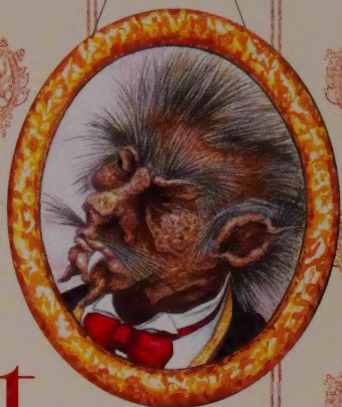


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Beauty, the Beast, and the Sisters A Thrice-told Tale



by Alvin Granowsky

Illustrations by Allan and Deborah Drew-Brook-Cornack.

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To my children Eric, Sedra, and Richard with love and gratitude
for teaching me the art of creating “thrice-told” tales
—A.G.

To the good-hearted beasts out there
—D-B-C

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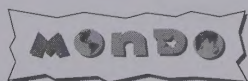
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Introduction

You are probably familiar with the popular, modern version of “Beauty and the Beast,” but are you aware that in the traditional fairy tale, Beauty has both brothers and sisters? We don’t learn much about Beauty’s brothers, but her sisters play a crucial role. Here they share their unique point of view of Beauty and her story.

Does it surprise you to hear that Beauty’s sisters may have a different point of view from either Beauty or Beast? In *Beauty, the Beast, and the Sisters: A Thrice-told Tale*, you will have the opportunity to examine three different points of view of the same story. Just as a judge has to piece through testimony to discover the truth, you will have the opportunity to do the same as you read each character’s tale.

Beauty is the first to tell her story. Throughout her harrowing tale, Beauty’s virtue consistently shines through. Can anyone really be that loving, trusting, and good?

In the second tale, you encounter Beast, who tells how he came to be “beastly” and about the heartbreaking treatment he was forced to endure. You may learn some powerful lessons from his story.

Finally, in the third tale, we meet Beauty’s two sisters, who believe they have suffered a lifetime of misery because of Beauty. Could the target of their rage and jealousy be the same lovely, selfless person who narrated the first tale? Well, let Beauty’s sisters share their pitiful story with you.

Once you’ve read these tales, you may notice a fourth point of view—your own. Who do you think told the most accurate version of the story? Which point of view did you most relate to? Which moral made the most sense to you, or did you come up with a different one? Your point of view, in addition to the experiences, values, and beliefs that you bring to your reading of the story, ultimately affects what you take away from it. Now begin your journey with *Beauty, the Beast, and the Sisters*!

Beauty

People call me Beauty, which embarrasses me, because my two older sisters are the truly beautiful ones. Their beauty comes from a perfection of features that is plain for all to see. Each of their jade green eyes is evenly matched to the other, and each alabaster ear is precisely the same size. Their upturned noses are perfectly centered beneath their glorious eyes, and their rose red lips are balanced precisely under their adorable noses.

How different their faces are from mine! Sadly my face is misshapen. My left eye is larger than my right, and the lobe of my right ear is lower than that of my left. Surprisingly no one other than my sisters seems to notice this. I was about seven years old when my sisters first brought my oddly shaped face to my attention.

Our elderly Aunt Serena had stopped by for tea and raisin cakes, and as we sat about chatting and sipping, she commented, "You are all such beautiful girls. Truly your beauty is a feast for my tired, old eyes. How proud your father must be!" But then she turned to me and said, "You are undoubtedly the most beautiful of all. It is not just your outer beauty that is so appealing, but that special glow of inner goodness that lights your lovely face. Surely the world will take note of how special you are. Truly you should be called Beauty!"

As you might imagine, I was thrilled by my Aunt Serena's observations. My two elder sisters were so beautiful, it had never occurred to me that my beauty might equal—let alone surpass—theirs. Aunt Serena had barely departed when both my sisters turned to me and said, "We would like to think you are beautiful. After all, you are our little sister, and we love you as only sisters can love one another. Unfortunately the truth is that your face is misshapen."

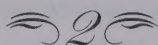
“Misshapen?” I questioned, a tremor in my voice. I was stunned and had to fight back tears.

“You mean you hadn’t noticed?” my eldest sister asked in disbelief. “Surely you must have observed that your left eye is of a different size than your right.”

“Can it be that you hadn’t noticed that your right earlobe hangs lower than your left?” my middle sister added helpfully. “Why I cringe every time I see them!”

“No,” I admitted. “I really hadn’t looked that closely.” I rose to my feet to look at myself in the hall mirror but was stopped by my eldest sister’s words.

“Well, no need to look now. We have looked for you, and you can take it from us—your face is misshapen! You needn’t worry about it, though, for we have enough beauty for the three of us. Whenever you feel sad about the way you look, just think about our beauty. We know that will help you feel better.”

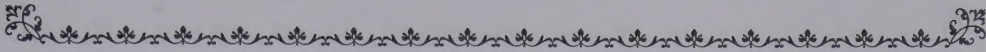


Considering how distorted my face was, it is surprising that people have persisted in calling me Beauty—although I have asked them not to. I know my being called Beauty upsets my loving sisters, because, as they so often observed, “We have been raised to respect honesty and to speak the truth. The truth is that you are not beautiful and, therefore, should not be called Beauty. We are the only beautiful ones!”

“Why then do you suppose people call me Beauty?” I asked. “Is it to mock me?”

“No doubt some are mocking you,” my sisters said kindly, hoping, I was sure, to spare me greater hurt. “We believe, however, that most people, trying to appear kind, say the opposite of what they are thinking.”

“May we counsel you not to be taken in by their dishonesty? It will do you no good to believe you are beautiful when you are not. The



truth is that we are the only beauties in this family. You must content yourself with the knowledge that you have two beautiful sisters and a rich father."

So I did. There was much to be thankful for being a member of our supportive and loving family. Father was a wealthy seafaring merchant whose ships sailed the oceans laden with great treasures to be traded in faraway lands. We lived in a mansion filled with valuable furnishings and elegant fabrics. Our wealth and my sisters' beauty were indeed the talk of the town.

Our father is a most loving man. After our gentle mother's early death, he gave us all his love. His devotion was unending and, I am afraid, he spoiled us with lavish gifts brought from all over the world. It reached a point where I would feel compelled to say, "Father, you have done enough. Far more than enough! We want for nothing! We do not need another pearl ring or emerald necklace or fragrant perfume from Arabia. You have provided us with enough gifts to last a lifetime."

"Speak for yourself!" my sisters would shriek. "If that is what you believe, then surely it can only mean that Father has given you far more than he has given us! For we do not have nearly enough!"

"Just last week, I could not go to the ball that I had my heart set on attending, as I had nothing to wear," my eldest sister said sadly, tears welling up in her gorgeous green eyes. "There was not one piece of jewelry—diamonds, pearls, or emeralds—that I had not been seen wearing before! I felt so terrible that I sobbed myself to sleep."

"And I was in my room sobbing just as loudly!" my middle sister exclaimed, large tears running down her flawless cheeks. "While she has little, I have even less! I can't possibly wear any of the gowns you have brought me. I have been seen in each of them at least once! And that green satin gown you bought for me on your last trip is wholly unacceptable for one of my social status."

"What about you, Beauty?" dear Father would ask. "Surely you do not have more than your older sisters. Have I been miserly with you,

too? Is there something special I can bring home for you?"

"Dear Father," I would respond from my heart, "all the gifts that I need are found in your love for me. I need nothing more. Seeing my beautiful sisters crying about what they do not have makes me feel ashamed for all that I do have. You have given me far too much!"

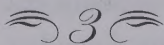
"Just as we suspected!" my sisters shrill voices chimed in. "She needs nothing more! We see the light on in her room night after night as she stays up counting the fine dresses and slippers and jewelry that you have lavished upon her. Surely you must admit that you have always given her more than us! That is why she needs nothing more now, while we suffer terribly from doing without!"

"Dear sisters," I said softly, "I stay awake reading. I love to read at night."

For reasons I could never understand, my sweet sisters would not believe that I spent my time reading. "Please! Spare us your untruths! We know what you are doing. You are counting your possessions. We would do it ourselves if only we could."

Then they would turn back to Father. "Promise you will get us something special on your next trip! Something better than you have ever bought before!"

Of course Father would promise, and then, with a hug for each of us, he would be off. And so it went, year after year—my sisters always feeling that they were cheated out of all that was their due, and I always feeling that I was given too much.



Then misfortune fell upon our family. A violent storm raged on the seas, and Father's wealth sank with his shattered ships. I was overwhelmed with joy to find Father's life had been spared. He returned to us, suddenly older and oh, so sad.

"We have lost everything!" Father said, his head bowed. "All of our riches are at the bottom of the sea."

“What are we going to do?” my older sisters wailed. “You have lost our inheritance! Our lives are ruined!”

“Dear Father, what can I do to help?” I asked. “We love you and only want that you be well.”

My dear sisters exclaimed. “You are misleading Father by uttering such outlandish falsehoods. His well-being is not nearly enough! We need our money! After raising us all these years to be rich, how can he come home and tell us that we are poor? That is truly callous and cruel of him!” My beautiful sisters were so upset that I am certain they did not realize how much their words injured Father.

Then one day, a most uplifting message came. One of Father’s ships survived the storm. By great good fortune, this ship was filled with the most valuable cargo of all. Hurriedly he prepared to depart for the port where the ship was scheduled to arrive.

“Now make sure you bring me back something luxurious!” my eldest sister exclaimed. “After what you have put me through, you will need to bring me a dazzlingly spectacular gift.”

“I want a huge pearl ring!” cried my other sister. “The bigger the pearl, the better! And perfectly round! And make sure the setting is platinum.”

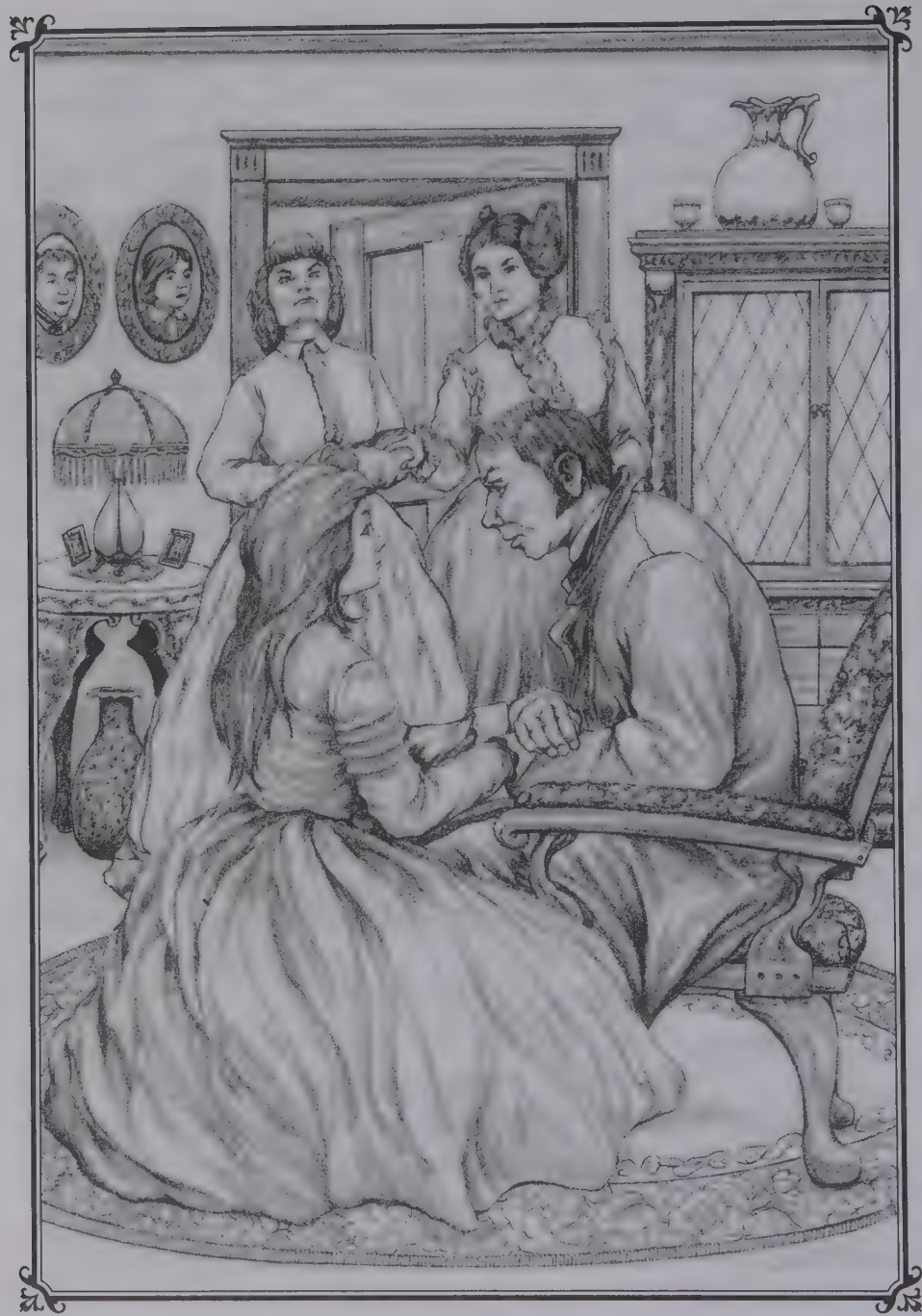
“What about you, Beauty?” my adoring father asked. “What can I bring for you?”

“Just yourself, Father. I only want to see you well and happy once again.”

“No, Beauty, that will not do. I cannot bring your sisters gifts and bring nothing for you. There must be something you would like.”

I knew that my father loved me greatly and wanted very much to bring me some fine gift. “Bring me a rose,” I said. “You know how much I love roses. One large red rose will make me happy!”

“I will bring you a rose,” said Father. “It will be the most breathtaking rose you have ever seen.” With those encouraging words, our doting father departed.





When Father arrived at the port where his ship was supposed to dock, he discovered a mistake had been made. It wasn't his ship that had survived, but that of another merchant. With heavy heart, Father set out empty-handed on his journey home.

"What? A mistake?" My ravishing sisters were beside themselves with bitterness and anger. "Are you saying that we are not rich once again? We are still poor? Father, how can you be so thoughtless and cruel as to hurt us in this way?"


Then my dear sisters cried out in grief. "What about the gifts you promised? Are you now going to inform us that you didn't bring them?"

Father nodded his head. "Dear daughters, I hope you will find it in your hearts to forgive me, especially now that I don't have much longer to live."

I gasped at his words. "Don't say that, Father! Poor people can live long and happy lives!"

"Allow me to complete my terrible tale," Father said, "and you will understand the truth I speak." Weary in heart and body, he had journeyed along the narrow road that led to our town. At dusk he had made a wrong turn and before long found himself staring at the iron gates of a magnificent castle. At first he thought of turning back, but then, fearing the gathering darkness and noticing that the gate was unlatched, he entered the castle grounds in search of sustenance and shelter.

"Can anyone hear me?" Father had called. There was no answer. All was still as if no living soul was about. Father knocked on the giant wooden door. Then he lifted the heavy iron knocker and rapped heavily. Once, twice, thrice. . . Without warning, the door creaked open, and Father stepped inside the castle. The wealth and elegance that greeted his eyes stunned him. The walls were crafted of marble from the finest quarry. The furnishings were of the finest workmanship, inlaid with silver, gold, and ivory.



“Who could live in such splendor?” Father wondered. Then the aroma of venison and roasted potatoes flooded his senses. He followed his nose to a huge banquet room where life-size portraits of noble men and women in gilded frames lined the walls. “Whose home could this be?” he wondered aloud. “It must certainly be the home of royalty.”

“A royal family?” My sisters called out, interrupting Father. “Do they have marriageable sons? Please, Father, tell us before we die of suspense.”

“There was no one to ask, my daughters. And sadly my tale does not have a happy ending.”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed my poor dear sisters, who had already experienced overwhelming disappointment. “Was the prince already married?”

“Daughters, please let me finish. The table was set for only one person, as if I had been expected. I sat down, and not having eaten since morning, I finished several platters of delicious food. Then, thinking to rest for just a moment, I lay down on a velvet sofa. The next thing I knew, I heard birds singing in the garden and a rooster crowing in the distance. I leapt to my feet. It was early morning, and I needed to be on my way.”


“Thank you, whoever you may be,” I called before closing the door behind me. “Your kindness is greatly appreciated.”

“Just as I was about to pass through the iron gates, I saw a red rose-bush with one especially exquisite bloom and thought, *At least I can bring Beauty the gift that I promised.*

“I plucked that breathtaking rose, and then horror befell me. A terrifying beast came rushing toward me. ‘Ungrateful human!’ it snorted. ‘I provided for you in your time of need, and this is how have you expressed your gratitude? You have stolen a rose from my most cherished rosebush. For stealing this rose, you must die!’”

My sisters and I gasped in horror. “No, Father! Tell us that it’s not true!”

“We will never forgive the trouble you have brought upon Father!”



my sisters spat as they turned on me. "Selfish, thoughtless creature that you are! Because of you, our beloved father will die!"

"Hush," Father begged us. "Let me complete my tale. I fell to my knees and pleaded with the creature to spare my life. I explained that I meant no harm—that I picked the rose for my precious daughter, who asked me to bring her a rose.

"The beast stopped me. 'Your life can be spared if your daughter is willing to trade her life for yours. I will allow you to leave, on one condition. You must bring your daughter back to take your place. If she will not come, you must return within three months to face your punishment. Should you not return, I will hunt you down, and you and your loved ones will pay a fearsome price.'"

Our cherished father lowered his head. "And that is the end of my terrible tale."

My beautiful sisters were so stricken with fear and grief for Father's well-being that they could not have known what they were saying. "How could you do this to us?" my oldest sister exploded. "First you tell us we are still poor and that you did not bring us the gifts we had been promised. And then you bring more bad news. Don't you know how upsetting these tales are? Do you not think of anyone but yourself?"

"Well, Father," my middle sister continued, "do not expect either of us to die for your foolish deed. You picked the rose. You must take responsibility for your actions."

Then, after just a bit of a pause, my devoted eldest sister added, "But wait! There is only one proper solution to this dreadful matter. Beauty must be the one to die."

"Yes, that is exactly my conclusion!" my middle sister exclaimed. "Beauty asked for that rose, and she is the reason you picked it. It is only proper that Beauty be brought to this beast to die in your place. She must take personal responsibility for the damage she has done!"

I placed my hand on Father's stooped shoulder. "My loving sisters speak the truth. It is because of me that this evil has befallen us. If you

should die because of me, I surely will die as well of a broken heart. The answer is clear, just as my sisters have said. I will take your place.”

Father would hear nothing of this talk. “I am old and do not have long to live. Therefore, I will return to the castle alone to suffer my fate at the jaws of that savage monster.”

“No, Father!” I protested. “Do you think I could live for one moment knowing I had caused your death? That thought would be more cruel than dying! You picked that rose because of your love for me. I will return with you. Nothing will change my mind!”



Father and I approached the castle gates, trembling with trepidation as they swung open. We entered the courtyard, and my eyes fell upon a beautiful rosebush. “Is that the bush from which you picked the rose? It is indeed lovely. I must confess, if I didn’t know the dreadful consequences that befell you, I would be tempted to pick a rose from that bush right now.”


Father and I inched our way toward the castle’s front door. “Are you sure you want to go through with this, Beauty? You can leave now while there is still time. I will gladly face this alone.”

“No, dear Father. I will not leave your side. As my sisters have so truthfully spoken, I am the cause of your misfortune and must take responsibility for the harm I have caused.”

“So be it.” Father knocked on the heavy wooden door, and it swung open.

As my eyes adjusted to the light, I was amazed by the elegance and opulence that lay before me. I admired the red marble walls, the white marble staircase that rose as if leading to the stars, and Persian carpets in all the colors of the rainbow. And it seemed that no one was there.

“Perhaps the beast has gone away,” I spoke hopefully as we made our way toward the banquet room where delicious aromas greeted us.



The long wooden table was set with gleaming silver and delicate porcelain. Giant white tulips bloomed in grand marble vases.

You would have thought a large dinner party would soon begin, but there were only two places at the table. "Could these be for us? Were we meant to dine by ourselves?"

"I believe so," Father said. "It was the same on the evening I came alone."

We sat down to dine. Strangely my fear disappeared. Whoever had prepared this lovely meal for us could not wish us harm. As I ate, my eye chanced upon a portrait at the far end of the room. A handsome youth in a life-size painting glowed with a goodness and nobility that came from within. His blonde, wind-blown hair and his sea blue eyes appeared to look right at me. *He is breathtaking!* I thought. *Who can he be?*

In the next instant, the creature entered the room. I must admit to jumping from my velvet chair at the first sight of it. Its face was covered with long, grayish brown hair, and two fierce fangs extended from its upper lip. Tufts of hair stood upright on its pointy ears, and its beady black eyes stared right through me. This animal was truly a terrifying sight.

"I see you brought your daughter," it said in a gentle voice, so at odds with its appearance. "That is good. What is your name?"

"Her name is Beauty," my Father said, his voice laden with fear. "She is here only because, fearing for my safety, she would not allow me to come alone. She has never done wrong or brought harm to anyone. May I trust you not to hurt her?"

"You may trust me," it responded in the same surprisingly gentle voice. "I will cause no harm to Beauty. I am called Beast," it said, bowing in greeting. Beast then turned to my Father and in a firm tone said, "In the morning, I will ask you to depart."

"And leave my beloved Beauty alone with you? No!" Father protested. "I cannot! I will not do that!"



“That is what I require!” Beast replied even more firmly.

“Father, do not fear for my safety. I place my well-being in Beast’s hands and trust with certainty that all will be well.” There was something so gentle and kind in the voice and manner of this creature that I felt no fear.



With many backward glances and reassuring words of his everlasting love, Father departed early the following morning. My fate was left wholly in the hands of Beast.

“My castle is yours to wander,” Beast said, after a lengthy silence. “Pass the day as you please. I will not intrude upon your time. I would, however, like to join you for dinner, if you do not object.”

How strange. It’s almost as if Beast is a shy young man who is courting me. Surely there is something here I do not understand. “I’ll look forward to having you join me for dinner,” I said.

“Thank you, Beauty,” Beast gently replied. “That would make me extremely happy.”

I spent the afternoon wandering through the glorious castle, knowing full well that I saw scarcely half the rooms. Each was more magnificent than the one before. How I wished my good sisters were here to admire the marble walls, the gold and silver fabrics that covered both windows and chairs, and the wondrously carved wooden furniture.

And then, when I felt I could see nothing finer, I came across a lovely room that bore a plaque upon its door. The word Beauty was printed in gold leaf.

What can this be? Has Beast set aside a room just for me? I entered. There was so much to see that it took a moment before my eyes came to rest on a crystal vase filled with the most beautiful red roses I had ever seen. Had Beast set them out for me? How thoughtful! My heart filled with a rush of warmth.

Then I saw the shelves of leather-bound books lining the farthest wall. Hundreds of books! I could spend a lifetime here and never read

them all. I opened the pages of one of them and found myself transported to a world beyond my imagination.

It seemed like only moments had passed when dusk colored the windows. *How glorious this afternoon has been! Surely I should be most content to spend my life in this manner.* I did not want to leave this room with its lovely red roses and books to last a lifetime. However, it was dinner-time, and I hurried to the banquet room.

I was no sooner seated than Beast entered. "May I watch you as you eat?" he asked kindly. "I hope you will not mind."

"I do not mind in the least," I replied. "There is a gentleness in your voice and manner that I find most appealing."

As I dined on wild turkey, white asparagus, and truffles, my eyes chanced again upon the portrait of the handsome young man, whose sea blue eyes seemed to look right at me.

"Beast," I asked, "who is that young man in the portrait? He is so noble in look and manner. I believe he must be a prince. Is he someone you know?"

"Yes, I knew him once," Beast replied slowly. "But that was long ago, and he is now gone."

"Is he dead?"

"In a way," Beast responded. "I cannot elaborate."


I wanted to pursue the issue but thought better of it. "There is something about that young man," I said, surprising myself with my words, "that reminds me of you."

"That lad is handsome," Beast replied. "I am hideous."

"Perhaps your outward appearance is startling," I answered honestly, "but I sense that on the inside, you are as beautiful as I sense him to be."

At these words, Beast looked directly at me. "Will you marry me? Will you be my wife?"

The question came from out of nowhere and took my breath away. How could someone I had only just met make such a request? How



could I respond to such a question? I closed my eyes and summoned my Father's wisdom.

"Beast, I cannot marry you," I replied, hoping not to hurt him with my honesty, "for I do not love you. I do care for you, however, and hope to be your friend."

"I understand," Beast said sorrowfully. "I am horrific to look upon. It is not possible to love someone who looks like I do. I do not blame you, Beauty. It is enough that you are here with me. I ask for no more."

And so we fell into a pattern. Each day I was left on my own to do as I chose, which usually meant reading one of Beast's leather-bound books. In the evening, we would meet at the banquet table. No matter what we discussed, I loved being with Beast. I admired his kindness, gentleness, intelligence, and the nobility of his mind.

At the end of each dinner, Beast would look at me gravely and ask, "Beauty, will you marry me? Will you be my wife?"

And I would always respond, "Beast, I cannot marry you, for I do not love you. I do care for you, however, and hope to be your friend."

In this manner, three months flew by. They were the happiest time of my life. Then one night in my dreams, I saw my Father, old and weak, lying in his bed, sobbing with grief for what he supposed was my unhappy fate.


I knew that I had to go to him so that he would know all was well with me. That evening at dinner, I told Beast of my dream and my need to return home. "My Father is old, sick, and grieving," I explained. "He needs me to comfort him. I must ask you to allow me to return home."

Beast looked at me for several moments, as if trying to read my inner thoughts. At last Beast whispered, "Will you return if I allow you to go?"

"Yes," I replied. "I will return."

"I know that you do not love me," Beast spoke softly. "I am grotesque, and I realize how you must feel about me. Why should I believe that you will return?"





"Beast, surely you must know how deeply I care about you. I would never do anything to hurt or mislead you."

"Beauty, will you marry me? Will you be my wife?" Beast asked earnestly.

"I cannot marry you, dear Beast, for I do not love you. I care about you deeply, but that is not the same as love. If I were to marry you without feelings of love, that would not be right for you or for me."

"I understand," Beast replied softly. "When would you like to return to your father?"

"Tomorrow."

"And when will you come back to me?"

"Within eight days. I will return within one week and one day from the time I depart."

"Take this ring and wear it on the second finger of your left hand while you are gone. It belonged to my mother, and I want you to have it. Tomorrow morning when you awaken, you will be in your father's home. When you are ready to return, place the ring on the second finger of your right hand before you go to sleep. When you awaken the following morning, you will have returned to me."

Just as Beast said, the next morning I was in my father's home.

"Oh, my beloved Beauty! You have returned!" my dear father cried in joy. "I feared I would never see you again."

I hugged Father and cried my own tears of joy at being reunited with this remarkable man who had spent his entire life trying to make his family happy.

"But why is the house so dark and gloomy? Where are the servants? Where are my sisters?"

Father looked at me sadly. "These last few months have been quite difficult. Our money is gone, so our servants have left. Your sisters have married and now live in their own homes in the center of town. I do not see them very often." Father sighed. "With one thing and another, they cannot seem to find the time."

“Are you living in this big house all alone then, with no one to help you?”

“Do not worry for me, Beauty. I am able to manage.” Father hesitated, not wanting to burden me with his problems. “It’s just that I cannot always get up from bed. But enough of that! Tell me about you, Beauty. Are you being treated well? Has Beast kept his promise not to harm you?”

“Beast is wonderful!” I exclaimed. “He is kind, thoughtful, and noble in every word and deed!” I heard the emotion in my voice and was surprised by how strongly I felt.

In the days that followed, I told Father the wondrous details of my life in the castle. As I spoke, I saw sadness depart from his eyes and the light of hope and happiness take its place. “I am so happy to have my beloved daughter home with me once more!”

One day I journeyed into town to visit my sisters. My middle sister lived in a fine stone house at the end of a charming cobblestone street. When she opened the door, her eyes grew wide with surprise. “Beauty, you are alive! We thought for sure you were long dead! Or at the least shackled in a castle dungeon!”

Then she saw the ring on my left hand. “Where in the world did you get that stunning ring?” she exclaimed. “I do believe that is an emerald set in platinum!” Lifting my hand, she held the ring up close to her squinting green eyes. “Why, I’ve never in all my days seen an emerald that large! Quickly come in and tell me where you got this ring! Did you steal it?”

“Sister, you know I don’t steal. This ring was given to me by Beast.”

My sister sat us down in her front parlor. “You say Beast gave you this ring? I trust you know this emerald is extremely valuable. Does Beast by any chance have other valuable things?”

“The castle has hundreds of rooms,” I replied, “and each is filled with magnificent things, lavish beyond anything I have ever seen.

More importantly, Beast is kind and gentle. He is so—”

“You can tell me about Beast later!” my sister exclaimed. “Now we must rush over to my husband’s shop, which is filled with the finest silver and porcelains to be found in town. You can compare it with items in the castle. We can use the prices of the items in my husband’s shop to determine the value of the items in the castle. I do hope you have made an inventory! You did that, didn’t you?”

“I did not, dear sister.”

“You did not make an inventory of all the goods in that castle?” My sister appeared horrified. “What then did you do with your time?”

“I read books,” I said simply, “just as I did when I lived at home.”

“Humpf!!!” my sister exclaimed. “Do not expect me to believe that anyone would be reading books when she could be counting all the possessions she might acquire if she married. Really, little sister, don’t take me for a fool!”

“I would never say—”


“Enough of this talk!” my dear sister exclaimed. “We have our work cut out for us. First we must go to my husband’s shop. Here, let me get parchment and a quill to begin our list. Let’s begin with this gorgeous silver tray that I required my husband to give me as a wedding gift. It was the finest in his shop, and I knew I must have it for my own. See how large it is! Look at the exquisite engraving. This magnificent tray is exceedingly valuable. “Might there be anything of this quality in Beast’s castle?” My dear sister was gushing, her cheeks reddening from excitement.

“Sweet sister, I do believe there are a number of trays similar to yours.”

My good sister appeared most interested. “A number of silver trays? As large as this one?”

“Well, not really as large—it seems to me they were much larger.”

“How much larger?” my sister asked, her green eyes growing ever greener.



"Oh, perhaps, three, maybe four times larger."

"Did they have any engraving on them?"

"I believe they did. A family crest is engraved in the center of each tray, and green and red stones are set into the border."

"Green and red stones? You are not talking about emeralds and rubies, are you?"


"Dear sister, I wish I knew more about precious stones to answer all of your questions. In any event, what difference does all that make? What really matters is the kindness and gentleness of Beast. I found myself caring more deeply for him with each passing day."

"We must meet with our eldest sister immediately!" my good sister exclaimed. "This is a most serious matter in which our futures can be greatly affected!" Grabbing my hand, she dragged me from her home to a similar one on the opposite side of the street. Soon the three of us were together in my eldest sister's comfortable parlor engaged in the most bizarre conversation.

"Beauty, it is up to you to restore our family's fortune!" my sensitive sisters exclaimed. "You have no idea how we have suffered while you were living a luxurious life in the castle. Bill collectors pounding on our door each day. Servants refusing to work simply because we had no money to pay them. And Father doing nothing to help—just lying in his darkened room, sobbing with grief over your fate. It was unbearable!"

"Our only way out was to marry. But we acted out of desperation, and as a result, each of us has been sadly misled," my eldest sister added.

"Yes, sadly misled!" my middle sister repeated. "My shopkeeper husband has nowhere near the amount of money one would have thought judging from all the fine things in his shop. Each night he burdens me with how few sales he has made and how much he owes for those treasures. For some odd reason, he has it in his head that I want to hear about his problems. 'Please stop your depressing talk!' I scream



each night. 'Please do not burden me with your problems. I married you so that I would not have problems!'"

"And my life is even worse!" my eldest sister exclaimed, tears running down her alabaster cheeks. "I married a banker, thinking the money in his bank was all his. Only later did I discover that the money belongs to other people who do not want me to have it! I was misled, and now I am stuck in an unsuitable marriage!"

"Yes," both sisters cried aloud, "we are trapped in unfortunate marriages! You, little sister, are our only hope! Tell us, does this Beast act as if he cares for you? Do you think you might somehow persuade him to marry you?"

"I believe Beast does care for me," I smiled, warmed by the memory of his gentle voice and loving glances. "Each evening at dinner he asked me to marry him. He said he wanted me to be his wife."

"And what did you say?" my sisters asked breathlessly.

"I said that I cannot marry him because I do not love him. I told him, however, that I care for him deeply."

"You have always been thoughtless and selfish!" my sisters cried out angrily. "But this is more than we can bear! At last we have an opportunity for happiness, and you throw it away! If you are too selfish to think about us, your beloved sisters, you could at least think about your poor sick father."

"What have I done?" I exclaimed in confusion. "I would never knowingly harm Father or either of you. You are my family, and you know that I love you!"

"Then marry Beast before some other girl with more sense steals him away!"

"But I don't love him," I spoke softly.

"What does love have to do with it?" my eldest sister cried out. "We're talking about marriage and property!"

"Yes, little sister," my middle sister said, "once you marry Beast, his belongings will be yours. Don't you see? More importantly, what is

yours will be ours—because you will want to share everything with your devoted sisters.”

“I do not love him,” I repeated firmly. “Unless I love him, I cannot marry him. It would not be fair to Beast or to me.”

With that I departed and returned to Father. There was much to be done to get his home back in order after so many months of neglect. From morning until night, I scrubbed and cleaned and polished and waxed. I cooked simple meals with vegetables from the garden. Above all, I held Father’s hand and comforted him.

“As long as you are here beside me, Beauty, I feel no loss,” Father reassured me.



The days faded one into another. A week had gone before I even knew it, and there was so much more to do. I had promised Beast that I would return within eight days, but I knew I could not keep my promise. My father could not be left alone. If I departed, no one would be there to help him.

My sisters claimed to be far too busy with their own lives and problems. “You have a lot of nerve asking us to help you with Father when you are unwilling to help us by marrying Beast. What goes around comes around,” they stated. “You would not help us; now we will not help you.”

Fortunately, just when I thought there was no one to help with Father, Aunt Serena solved the problem. “I will move in to your father’s home,” she announced. “I am lonely now that my husband has died and will enjoy my brother’s company.”

That night, for the first time since I had arrived home 12 days before, I slept soundly. But I had a most disturbing dream. I saw Beast lying in the courtyard beside the rosebush. He was dying of a broken heart. I quickly placed the ring on my right hand. “Oh, my beloved Beast, do not die! I will be there soon!”

The very next morning, I awakened in my room in the castle. "Beast!" I called out, rushing from my room. "I have returned! Where are you?"

I ran through the castle calling for him, but there was no reply. Then I remembered my dream and raced to the courtyard.

"Dear Beast!" I cried out in alarm, seeing a shape lying quite still on the ground. "My beloved Beast, I have returned to be with you!"

Still there was no response, and I feared that I had returned too late. "I love you, Beast! I love you with all my heart!" I heard myself crying and only then fully realized how much I truly did love Beast. "You cannot be dead! I love you, my sweet Beast!"

At my words, Beast stirred. His eyes fluttered weakly. "Beauty, is that you? Have you really returned to me? Did I hear you say you love me, or is this just another dream from which I shall sadly awaken?"

"No, Beast, you are not imagining this. You are not dreaming! I am here. And, yes, I did say 'I love you,' because that is what I feel."

"Then, Beauty, answer the question that I have so often asked. Will you marry me? Will you be my wife?"

Hugging Beast tightly, I cried out with all the feeling in my heart. "I love you, Beast, and because I love you, I can answer. Yes, I will marry you! Yes, I will be your wife!"

"Oh, dear Beauty!" Beast cried. "Your love has freed me to be the one I truly am!"

"Freed you? Dear Beast, I do not understand." Then even as I spoke, I saw a change come over my hulking Beast. Before my eyes, fur and claws disappeared, and my beloved changed into a handsome man—a grown-up version of the boy in the painting. "Why, you're the boy in that portrait!"

He reached out to take my hand. "Yes, dear Beauty, I was that boy. Now that I am freed to be the man I truly am, I can say, dearest Beauty, that I love you with all my heart and will be honored to marry you."



"But it is Beast that I love," I protested. "I do not know you. How can I love you if I do not know you? You are a stranger to me. An extremely good-looking stranger, I must admit, but a stranger nonetheless."

"Beauty, you do know me, for I am Beast. It is just my outward appearance that has been altered. Inside I am the same Beast you have come to know and love. There is no difference except in the way I look. Are looks really that important to you?"

Indeed, his voice was the same. And the feelings of kindness, gentleness, and nobility that I had sensed in Beast, I sensed in him also. "Please give me a moment to adjust. This change is so profound!"

One moment passed and then another. Suddenly I knew in my heart that I loved him. I would learn to adjust to his altered appearance, because outward looks tell nothing of the heart.

"Beauty, will you marry me?" my prince asked. "Will you be my wife?"

"Yes, I will marry you, my prince. I will be your wife."

"Then it is time to celebrate!" my enchanting prince cried out, as he began to dance around me. "One month from this day will be our wedding day!"



I know full well there have been many exquisite weddings, but may I say in all modesty that my wedding day was among the most wondrous of all. Hundreds of jubilant guests filled the castle's courtyard and grand ballroom. Their prince had been restored and that in itself was cause for celebration. Each took the opportunity to tell me how happy they were for us.

One special guest stood out from the rest. It was the troll who had brought such misfortune upon my gentle prince when he was just a boy. She stood before me, leaning on her knobby cane as she held out her withered hand. "I never thought this day would come, but





now that it is here, I am happy for you both."

I held her hand in mine. "Thank you for saving my prince for me. You were most kind."

"Was I?" The troll seemed surprised. "I didn't think I was being kind!"

"Sometimes we do things without knowing quite why. Whatever reason you may have thought you had, I know you helped unite me with my beloved. I thank you for our happiness and wish you happiness, as well."

"What a sweet and lovely girl!" the troll exclaimed to my prince. "You are indeed fortunate that I saved you for her!"

The orchestra began to play, and my glorious prince took me in his arms for our first waltz. He was so handsome, and in his arms, I felt beautiful. That my left eye was larger than my right, and my right earlobe lower than my left were all forgotten. This special day was a dream come true.

"Look," he whispered. "I do believe your sisters are growing bigger right before my eyes."

I looked across the ballroom to where my sisters stood. They had grown larger—far larger than when we had greeted them, Father, and Aunt Serena upon their arrival. "I cannot understand why, but indeed I see that you are right! Oh, dear," I exclaimed, "I hope they have not caught some rare disease! There seem to be bulges on all parts of their bodies!"

"But what can it be?" my thoughtful prince asked, and as he did the explanation became clear. As we watched, my eldest sister stuffed a silver bowl beneath her shawl. My middle sister slipped a silver spoon into her bodice.

"Your sisters are stealing!" my prince whispered. "Their thievery must be stopped at once!" He started toward them.

I stopped my beloved with a touch of my hand. "We have so many things—far more than we will ever need. Above all, we have

each other, and I need no more than that. Let them have the few things they are taking.”

My gentle prince took me in his arms, thrilling me with his words. “All my life I have waited for you. You are all that I need. Your sisters can have whatever they want.”

I must admit, however, that despite my words to my husband, I was deeply disturbed by my sisters’ unseemly behavior. At the first opportunity, I went to them. “Dear sisters,” I said, “is there some reason you are stuffing all those pieces of silver into your clothing?”

“Silver? Stuffed in our clothing? You must be mistaken.” As my eldest sister spoke, a silver bowl slipped from her shawl and hit the marble floor with a thud.

“Now look at what you have caused me to do! Undoubtedly there will be a dent in that bowl, and I will not use a dented bowl.”

“That bowl and all the other silver pieces you have hidden in your garments belong to my husband. He would like to keep them in the castle with all the other beautiful possessions that he owns. They will be here to enjoy whenever you visit, and I truly hope you will visit often to share in the abundance of our lives and our home.”


“Your lives! Your home!” my sisters exclaimed indignantly, their alabaster skin now flushed pink. “What about our lives? What about our happiness?”

I was truly shocked at their anger. “Beloved sisters,” I exclaimed, “are you not happy for me on my wedding day?”

“Why should we be happy for you when you are the cause of our suffering? Because of you, we have done without all our lives. Do you think we are not aware that all you have should rightfully have been ours?”

“I do not understand what you are saying!” I protested. “Surely you must know that I love you and would never take anything from you!”

“Then tell us why you and Father misled us with all your talk of



a ferocious beast?" my oldest sister badgered. "Please explain, if you can, why Father brought you to meet the prince, knowing full well that the prince would then marry you for the simple reason that he had never met us."

"Now that you and Father have schemed to get the prince and all of his wealth," my middle sister added, "you have the nerve to complain about our taking a few pieces of silver? Everything that is yours should rightfully be ours!"

I stared at my sisters in disbelief. Could it be that they did not truly love me as I loved them? Quickly I dismissed that thought.

"Dear sisters," I replied, "I am sorry you feel wronged. If the silver helps you feel better, please take it. Whatever we have, we will share with Father and you. What truly matters is that we love one another, not the things we may or may not have."


As I turned to rejoin my prince, I heard my two beautiful sisters exclaim, "Oh, just listen to Miss High and Mighty! We have more than we need! Ha! Doesn't Beauty think she is something special! Just because she schemed and plotted her way . . ."

Sadly one of the people who heard their tirade was the troll, who requested that my sisters stop their vicious talk on my wedding day.

As I understand it, my sisters then turned their anger upon the troll and commented loudly about the purple warts on her nose. That was apparently a sensitive topic, causing the troll to wave her knobby cane at my sisters, turning them into stone statues outside our castle doors.

"How long will they be statues?" I asked, and was told by the troll herself, "Until they express remorse for their evil words and feelings, and ask for forgiveness."

The troll's words relieved my worry. Obviously—with just a little time and thought—my sisters would do what was right and good. I looked forward to the joyful day when my loving sisters and I would be together once again. In the meantime, I would be happy living



with my prince in our glorious castle. Life was truly wonderful, which
inspires the following moral:



*“If you want a happy life,
look for the good that is to be found all around you
and within yourself and others”*



Beast

A life-size painting hanging in the banquet hall shows me as I once was, a handsome boy with sea blue eyes set off by golden hair. My skin was fair and flawless, suffused with the pinkish glow of health and vigor, and my features were as strong and perfect as a Greek sculpture. I had a smile on my lips and a sparkle in my eyes, as if anticipating the wonderful happiness of each new day.

Then in one dreadful, life-altering instant, everything changed. A scary, vindictive troll appeared and, with a wave of her knobby old cane, changed my life. “You made a party for the entire kingdom but did not invite me—just because I am twisted and hideous with purple warts on my nose!” she screamed. “Do you know how it feels to be excluded for being unattractive?”

“How should I know how that feels?” I replied honestly. “I was born with this face. Therefore I have never experienced your sort of unattractiveness and the rejection it has brought you.”

Perhaps if I had just left it at that, none of this would have happened. Unfortunately, in my naïve youth, I talked more than was necessary. “I am indeed sorry for you and the way that you look, because you are truly ugly. I can think of no word that sums it up more clearly. However,” I added truthfully but kindly, “I do believe that if you are kind and good inside, people will not care about your looks. They will see the good that is inside of you and forget all about those huge purple warts on your nose.”

Apparently her warts were a sensitive subject because as soon as I mentioned them, the troll turned a reddish green and screamed, “Don’t waste your empty words or pity on me! Save them for yourself! We’ll see how many people notice the good that is inside you! Since you are so sure that people are able to see inner beauty, you will



remain in this form until a beautiful and virtuous girl sees through your ugliness and comes to love you for who you are on the inside.”

Not understanding what she meant, I foolishly stammered, “My ugliness? What on Earth are you talking about? You are the unattractive one. I am handsome—extremely so, as a matter of fact. Just ask my mother. Or any of the girls in my Tuesday afternoon dance class. They have been known to claw at each other over who will dance with me next.”

The troll continued as if my words meant nothing. “Yes, indeed, this beautiful girl will come of her own free will to be your wife because of the good she sees beneath your ugliness. Heh! Heh! Heh! Be sure to invite me to your wedding!” With another shriek of scornful laughter, the evil troll waved her mangled cane at me and vanished.

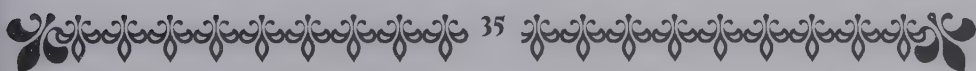
At first I didn’t realize that anything had changed. I felt and thought the same. The sun was still a glowing globe in the blue summer sky. I was a young and happy prince in a rich and beautiful kingdom, and life was good.

Then one day as I was out playing in the forest, a fierce-looking paw caught my eye. *How strange!* I thought, noting five long claws jutting from it. *And scary, too! Perhaps I had better return to the palace.* As I turned and ran, I could not help noticing that the paw was running with me. In fact, there were two paws running with me, moving up and down right before my eyes—each with vicious claws that could rip me from stem to stern. “Aaaaachhh!” I screamed as I ran into the castle and passed by the mirror in the front entrance hallway.

I stopped dead in my tracks. Looking back at me was a hairy face with two jagged canine teeth extending from the mouth, cold black eyes, and pointy ears with tufts of hair pointing up from their tips.

“Help! Help!” I screamed and each time I opened my mouth, the monster in the mirror opened its mouth to scream, too.

One can deny the truth for only so long. At last I had to accept the





dreadful reality that while I felt the same inside, it appeared I was now a monster on the outside. The miserable troll was to blame!

My screams of horror brought my poor, frantic mother running from the other side of the castle. "I'm coming, my darling! I'm on my way!" How can I ever forget my loving mother's response when she first saw me. Her screams echoed through the castle, draining all hope from my heart that just maybe I wasn't as horrible looking as I had feared.

"Mother, don't be afraid. It's me . . . your . . . uh . . . your son."

Fortunately my voice had not changed and, as they say, a mother always knows her child. After just a few short weeks of crying and hand-wringing, Mother began to accept the altered me. Every now and then, however, I would hear her wail uncontrollably, "Oh, how I wish I had invited that spiteful troll to the party!"

"No, Mother, you are not totally to blame. I showed poor judgment, too. How was I to know that she would be so sensitive about those dreadful warts?"

"Fortunately no great harm has been done," Mother consoled me. "You are still healthy and whole. It is just your looks that have been altered." Mother sniffled. "What are looks anyway?" she continued. "It is what is inside that genuinely matters. And you are still as kind, thoughtful, brave, sensitive, and intelligent as you always were." She hesitated. "You are, are you not?" She squinted as if to see through my monster's face to the kind and noble person inside.

"Of course I am the same person inside. Perhaps I would not remember how drastically I have changed if I never again had to look at myself." So we covered all of the mirrors in the castle. It was quite a sacrifice for Mother, who was slender and lovely with a fondness for admiring herself in the mirror as she combed her golden curls.



At first we tried to pretend that nothing had changed. “You are the same person, after all.” Mother would continually repeat these words in an attempt to convince us both.

Unfortunately there was the small matter of our distraught servants, who screamed every time I came near. Before long our castle staff had dwindled to just a loyal few. I grew to understand a sad fact of life—that people often equate attractiveness with goodness and ugliness with evil.

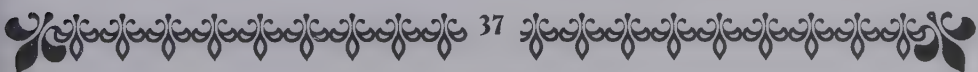
Over the years I was to suffer many indignities—too numerous and painful to describe. One particularly hurtful incident happened a few days after my transformation, the day of my Tuesday afternoon dance class. Mother had rehearsed a simple explanation that we hoped would solve the little problem of my altered appearance. “The prince is still the wonderful young man he has always been. He is the same handsome man you have danced with in the past. It is just that now he looks like a hideous monster. Please do not allow his change in appearance to concern you.” I smiled in my friendliest manner as Mother spoke, confident that I would no longer have problems concerning my looks.

Unfortunately each girl I asked to be my dance partner declined. First Gloriana said, “Oh, dear, I wish I could, but my new slippers are pinching my toes so tightly. Each step is frightfully painful!”

Then Genevieve said, “Thank you so much for asking me to dance with you. But my father has forbidden me to dance with boys until I turn 18, and at the present time, I am only 10.”

“But you have been dancing with boys here for the past year!” I exclaimed, not understanding her change in policy. “Why, we danced together just last week!” Still she refused.

Then the most humiliating moment came. It was the last dance—the one in which each girl picks a young man as her dance partner. In the past, girls had shoved each other aside to secure me as their partner.





Now all of the girls frantically grabbed partners to avoid being stuck with me. At last only a particularly homely girl and I remained. I approached her, assuming she would be happy to have me dance with her since she was—to put it kindly—odd looking. I reached out to take her hand. “I believe you and I are the only ones left. Shall we dance?” I asked graciously.

She recoiled, saying, “I would love to dance with you, but I am allergic to animal hair.”

“Animal hair?” I didn’t understand. “What do you mean?”

“The hair all over your face and hands—er, paws.” She spoke loudly so that all present could hear. “You may be a prince, but you look like a monster, and I cannot dance with you!”

I sobbed the entire way home in the royal carriage. Mother held me close and told me everyone felt left out sometimes. *But I will face this rejection and humiliation my entire lifetime.*

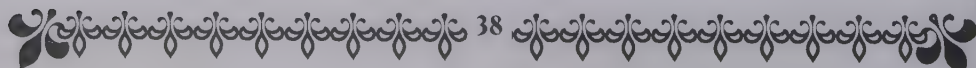
Never again did I go to the Tuesday afternoon dance class. Never again did I expect anyone to see beyond my outside ugliness. My optimism and hope disappeared and were replaced by hurt and anger. I completely understood the bitterness of that miserable troll.



And so the years passed. Each morning and evening, Mother would smile bravely and say, “Inside you have everything that is worthy—kindness, honesty, courage, intelligence, thoughtfulness, and caring. I am so proud of you!”

Despite her words, Mother would keep the carriage’s red velvet curtains tightly drawn on those rare occasions when we ventured out of the castle. “To help keep out the chill,” she would say. I knew it was not the chill that worried Mother as much as the prying eyes of people who would gawk at the ghastly creature dressed in fine clothes.

The castle became our refuge. Mother and I discovered reading to be our greatest pleasure. We would read tales of adventure and travel







from the leather-bound books in my favorite room. We shared poetry celebrating happiness and love. On special days, Mother played the harp, and I sang our favorite songs in my delightful baritone.

One dark, starless night, I was awakened by a loud crash down the hall. *Surely Mother is not up and about at this hour*, I thought. *Could one of the servants be awake? Old blind Jasper perhaps?*

Opening my bedroom door, I saw two burly, masked robbers, their bags full of our precious possessions. As they headed toward Mother's suite, I feared for her safety. "Be gone!" I bellowed, running towards them, fearful of what they might do to me, yet unwilling to allow harm to befall my mother.

The burglars were startled, but it wasn't until I drew nearer and they got a better look at me by the light of their lanterns that the larger man began to shake and scream. "It is a hideous beast!" he shouted. Silver candlesticks flew into the air. "Don't eat us!" the thieves shrieked as they raced out the castle door.

Watching those robbers run in terror at the sight of me made me realize just how indescribably frightening I must appear. Oddly this newfound information gave me a surge of power and elation, which was far better than feeling unloved, ugly, and rejected. If people could not love me, then they would fear me! Yes, I would become precisely what they thought I was—a terrifying beast fearsome to behold!

So began an unfortunate period in my life. Inside my heart, I became the monster that everyone saw. When Mother was taking her afternoon nap, I would wander from the castle grounds, seeking victims to terrorize. It became my habit to hide behind a tree or fence, waiting for an unsuspecting person or couple to come near. Then I would leap out and roar, "I am your worst nightmare. I have come to feed!" As my victims raced off shrieking in horror, I would roll on the ground with laughter. What fun it was to frighten people! What a wonderful way to spend an afternoon!

Then one day, I jumped on the pathway as a young boy approached,





but he did not run. He stood frozen, then crumpled in a heap to the ground. For one horrifying instant, I feared the boy had died of fright. *If he is dead, I am to blame*, I thought. Fortunately, after several moments, he began to stir. Running to his side, I placed my paw upon his forehead, just as he opened his eyes.

"I only look like a monster," I assured him in my kindest voice. "This is a costume I wear. Trust me. I will not rip you to shreds or cause you harm."

"You won't kill me?"

"Indeed, I will not," I assured him.

"Will you allow me to rise to my feet and walk slowly, very slowly, away?" he asked in a wavering voice.

"Indeed, I will."

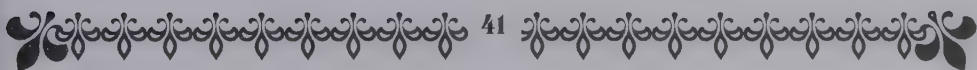
With that, he rose to his feet. "Nice to meet you," he smiled, then streaked like a lightning bolt off into the distance, screaming, "Help! Help! I have been attacked by a dreadful monster!"

That night as I lay awake in bed, I asked myself: *Am I going to be what others perceive me to be? Just because others think I am a monster does not mean I have to become one.* I vowed to once again be true to my good nature. *I am kind, caring, and noble—and that is how I intend to live the rest of my life.*



Mother was loyal and loving, and she actually became quite comfortable with my looks. She learned to hold my paw and clip my claws with garden shears when they grew too long. She would lovingly trim my bushy eyebrows when they grew to cover my eyes. Most importantly, Mother would hug me close—without flinching—when I needed comfort, just like in the old days.

Time passed, and one day Mother began to talk of love and marriage. I barely remembered my father, for he had died shortly after my





birth. When Mother would talk about him, it was if he were still a young man courting her. "He was my great love, and love is the most important thing in life! Your father was so handsome and tall. You looked so much like him when . . ." She stopped herself. "We must adjust to the changes life throws at us. But one thing that never changes is the need to love and be loved. It is time that you begin thinking about marriage. Somewhere lives a wonderful young woman who will see beneath your exterior to the good that is within you."

"Mother, do you really think I will ever have a love as great as you and Father shared? Will there ever be someone special who will be able to love someone who looks like me?" She took my hairy paws into her smooth, soft hands and whispered, "We can hope, my son. We can hope."

Mother grew ill and frail, and soon my only friend in the world began to slip away. Can you imagine my fear and feelings of loneliness? What would happen to me when Mother was gone?

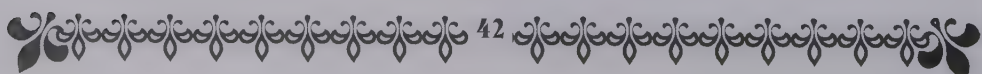
One day in early spring, Mother brought me over to her favorite spot on the castle grounds—near a rosebush she had planted. An especially beautiful red rose had just come into bloom. "My son, I will soon be gone. I want you to look at this beautiful rose and remember my words. Someday a beautiful girl as wonderful and true as this rose will appear. She will recognize your inner beauty and goodness. That wonderful young woman will love you and become your wife."

That night my mother died, and I was left alone.



For months I mourned. I ate little. I rarely slept, and when I did I had nightmares filled with bitter loneliness. *Without love, life is not worth living! What chance have I to find love?*

In the beginning, remembering Mother's encouraging words, I did attempt to meet women. I asked that a proclamation be read throughout the kingdom stating that the prince was of an age to seek a wife





and would be available to meet eligible women.

A few women came on their own, but most were dragged into the castle by a mother or father. "Look at all the wealth!" I would hear the parent whisper encouragingly. "See all that silver and gold! He has even more hidden away! It can all be ours if you pretend that you love him! Looks don't matter when someone is as rich as he is. Now stop crying, you silly thing!"

Occasionally a girl would pretend to love me. "Oh, yes, I want nothing more than to be your wife! Come, let me hold your—er—paw!" But I would soon see revulsion in her eyes. She would not want me. She would only want my possessions.

"Would you still want to be my wife if I did not have a fortune? If all this wealth was actually someone else's property?" I would ask.

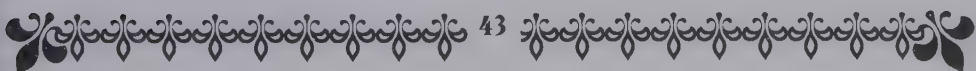
"This castle is not yours? The silver, gold, diamonds, pearls, and rubies do not belong to you?" she would demand indignantly.

"They belong to my older brother who lives in a faraway land," I would fib to determine her true feelings. "All the wealth you see is his."

"Who would marry a hideous beast like you if you did not have great wealth!" would be the predictable response. "Why have you wasted my time pretending to be rich and ugly, when you are simply ugly? Imagine having to kiss a mouth with fangs like those!" she would yell as she stormed out the door.

My days were bleak, and sadness clouded my life. As I lay in bed at night, my mind would repeat the same question again and again. *Mother, why did you fill my heart with hope of finding true love when it is not meant to be?*

One night in my dreams, a strange answer came from Mother's lips. "Tomorrow evening an aging gentleman will come upon our castle. It will not be by chance. Leave the front door unlocked and have a feast prepared for him." As the dream was fading, she uttered, "Beauty is her name . . . Beauty . . ." I bolted upright in my bed. "Beauty? What does that mean?" But the dream had ended, and Mother was gone.







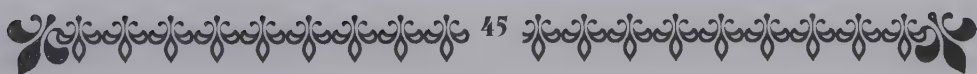
The next night I had a feast prepared, and I left the front door to the castle unlocked. Just as Mother detailed in the dream, an elderly gentleman entered the castle. He looked around, calling out, "Who lives here? I am sorry to barge in, and I will not take anything. I just need a place to spend the night."

He saw the finery and the opulent feast set out at the banquet table and called out, seeking permission to sup. When no response came, he feasted. After dinner he reached into his vest and removed a locket containing pictures of his children, placing it on the table before him. Large tears fell from his dark eyes, as he cried out in anguish, "Oh, how can I tell my daughters that all is lost! Beauty will not care, but her sisters will be distraught!"

Beauty? "Beauty is her name," Mother had said. I trembled when I realized that Beauty was his daughter! *Can this girl be the answer to all of my dreams?*

After dinner the sad old man wandered into the sitting room. Before long he fell into a deep sleep, his snores echoing through the banquet hall. I slipped stealthily into the room to examine the photograph. My paws began to tremble. Three young women looked back at me. Each was beautiful, and all were smiling. The smile on the older girls' lips, however, held no warmth. Their eyes betrayed a hardness that raised the fur on my neck.

But the youngest girl was different from her sisters. Her smile radiated genuine warmth. She glowed with a beauty that came from within. *Surely this is the one the old gentleman called Beauty. How fitting a name for this girl!* And in that instant, Cupid's arrow pierced my heart. How could I ever meet her? And if I did, would she—could she—ever care for someone like me? My heart beat rapidly as I wondered, "Could this be my one chance for true love, for happiness?"





❖ 6 ❖

As I watched the elderly gentleman prepare to depart, I wanted to call out to him—*please let me meet your daughter!* But I knew that the sight of me would send him running, terrified by the monster that appeared before him. He would never willingly bring his daughter to me. Would I have done so, if I were in his shoes?

Just as he was about to pass through the castle gates, he paused in front of the rosebush that Mother had planted. It held a solitary rose in full bloom. It was as beautiful as the one that grew there on the day that she had spoken of true love. Imagine my indignation as I watched the old man pick the rose. “Ungrateful!” I snarled, as I leapt out. “I helped you in your time of need, and this is how you show me gratitude? I love these roses more than any of my other possessions, and you have stolen the finest one of all. For this you must die!”

The merchant fell to the ground and pleaded for his life. “Please do not kill me! I meant no harm. I picked the rose for one of my daughters. She had asked me to bring her a rose and . . .”

I had a sudden brainstorm and interrupted him. “Your life can be spared if your daughter would be willing to take your place. I will allow you to leave so you can either fetch her or settle your own affairs. Either way you must return here within three months. If you do not return, I will hunt you down.”

The merchant left, promising to return. Would he keep his word? More importantly, would he have Beauty with him? What if he brought one of the older daughters? No, that would not do! They were beautiful on the outside but ugly within.

I calmed myself with the thought, *What is meant to be will be. Was I meant to know love? If so, I will know it. If not . . .* I could not bear to finish the thought.

The weeks crept by with no sign of the merchant's return. As the three months drew to a close, I spent the better part of each day





watching the road that wound up the mountainside. One day there he was! And riding behind him was a girl. As they drew closer, I saw in living splendor the face I had fallen in love with in the picture. The impact was almost more than I could bear. She was so lovely! She was all that I ever wanted.

I saw to it that the castle's front door was unlocked, just as before. Knowing they would be hungry after their journey, I had a feast set out on the banquet table. They ate, looking around with each bite, waiting for something to happen.

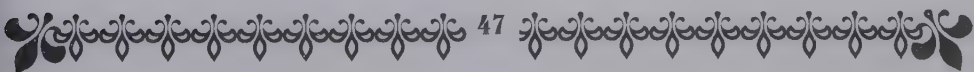
After the dinner was eaten, I stepped into the room and looked directly into Beauty's lovely hazel eyes. "Have you come here willingly?"

Startled, both the gentleman and his daughter jumped from their chairs. Collecting herself, the girl nodded, and although I could tell she was frightened by my appearance, she replied in a brave and steady voice, "I could not allow my dear father to come here alone. Whatever is to be faced, I will face it for him."

I stared deeply into Beauty's eyes to see her soul and sensed that it was as beautiful as her face. "You are very good," I said gently, "and I am much obliged for your being here." Then I turned to her father. "You, Sir, must be gone by tomorrow morning. You will leave your daughter with me, but you need not fear for her well-being. I may be called Beast, but you can trust me as a gentleman. No harm will come to her."

In the early morning hours, I heard the gentleman protesting to his daughter that he could not leave her to the mercy of a beast. Beauty held firm. "My sisters need you. You are their father too, and they need your guidance and love. Beast said he would not harm me, and I believe him. There is a gentleness in his voice and manner that brings me comfort."

I waited for her father to depart and watched what Beauty would do. She called out to me, "Beast, where are you?" When I did not appear, she began to explore the castle. I wanted her to see all its





amazing riches. There were treasures of gold and silver. There were jewels—diamonds, pearls, and emeralds. There were portraits of great kings and queens and one of me as a young boy.

Beauty stared at that portrait for several moments and spoke aloud words that resounded in my heart. “How strange,” she said. “The feeling of kindness and gentleness I sense while looking at this boy is much like the feeling I get while looking at Beast.”

Soon she came to my favorite room. She was shocked to see her name on the door engraved in gold leaf. She entered to see luxurious furnishings—Persian rugs, carved chairs inlaid with gold, ancient fabrics laced with silver and gold. I heard a gasp of wonder at the shelves of books that Mother and I had shared. “How thoughtful of Beast to select these wonderful books for me!”

For the remainder of the day, Beauty stayed in her room reading. That evening as she began partaking of the feast I had set out for her, I entered the room, allowing her to see me for the first time that day. “Will it disturb your dinner if I join you while you dine? You have only to tell me to go away, and I will leave at once. I know I am repulsive.”

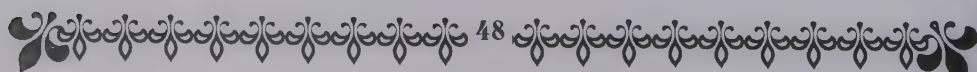
“How can you be repulsive when you are so kind and good?” replied Beauty. “I was hoping you would join me. Please stay.”

Feelings of joy swept over me as I watched this magnificent girl who seemed to be so at ease with me. I was overwhelmed by strong emotions and blurted out, “Beauty, will you marry me? Will you be my wife?”

I could see that Beauty did not want to hurt my feelings. She thought for a moment, then spoke slowly and sensitively. “No, Beast, I cannot be your wife. You have been kind to me, and I am grateful for that, but I do not love you.”

I sighed deeply. “I know that you cannot love me, for I am too gruesome to be loved. Good night, Beauty.”

For three months, Beauty remained with me in the castle. I could sense her feelings for me were changing, and she would say things that





warmed my heart. "Beast, you are so gentle and kind. I find myself looking forward to seeing you each night at dinner. You have come to be someone I care for greatly."

Her words gave me hope, so each night I would ask, "Beauty, will you marry me? Will you be my wife?"

"No, Beast. I cannot marry you for I do not love you. But I do care for you and hope to be your friend always."

"I must accept what you say, for I know how unsightly I am. I will have to be happy just knowing you are living in my castle and that you will be here always."

My words made Beauty sad. She told me of a dream she had that her father was ill—suffering the loss of his daughter. "Beast," Beauty said gently, "my father needs me to be with him, or he will die of grief. I must go to him."

"Then you must leave," I said hopelessly. "And I will surely perish because I love you too much to live without you."

"No, you will not die!" Beauty exclaimed. "For I will return within eight days. I may not love you, but I care for you. I will return to be with you. Do not worry, my kind and gentle Beast."

"You will be at your father's home by tomorrow morning. I will see to that." Placing Mother's emerald and gold ring upon the second finger of Beauty's left hand, I told her, "When you are ready to return to me, just remove this ring from your left hand and place it upon the second finger of your right hand. You will return here at once."





❧ 7 ❧

Every day of Beauty's absence was excruciating. I paced the castle grounds, hoping to make the days pass faster. Day one . . . day two . . . day three . . . day four. Maybe she would return earlier than the eight days she asked for. Day five . . . day six . . . day seven. On the eve of the eighth day, I could not sleep. Beauty would return to me the next morning! Not as the wife I wanted, but at least as someone who cared about me and appreciated the goodness within me.

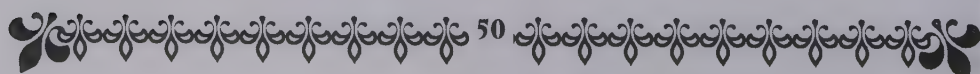
Day eight dawned with a crash of lightning. Was it an omen? There were loud thunderclaps, and then rain poured down, shattering the silence of my peaceful castle. As dusk began to fall, I realized that Beauty would not return that day.

On day ten of Beauty's absence, reality settled heavily upon me. Beauty would not return. I studied the portrait of me as a boy, once so full of promise. Now all hope of happiness had vanished. I roared in pain, "Even the most pure of heart judge others by their appearance. That is the pathetic way of the world!"

Now I fully understood the troll's bitter anger at my empty words—*people will see the good that is inside you*. How naive of me! It must have seemed like such mockery.

After Beauty had been away for 12 days, I stopped watching for her return, knowing I'd never see her again. That night I dreamed of Beauty basking in the happiness of her family. Suddenly a weakness came over me, unlike any I had ever felt before. I was barely able to stagger out to the garden where Mother's rosebush grew. Collapsing on the ground, I cried out, "Oh, Beauty, you have deserted me! Without you, I no longer want to live."

I closed my eyes. How long I lay there I do not know. Suddenly I felt a delicate hand placed in mine. I heard the soft voice of my beloved crying out, "Beast! I have returned! You must not wither and







die!" And then, as if it were my imagination playing tricks on me, I heard the words I yearned to hear. "Oh, my sweet Beast, you are so kind and gentle and good! I do love you, Beast! I want to be your wife!"

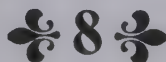
I opened my eyes in shock. This girl, whose beauty was as great inside as out, had actually said she loved me. She wanted to be my wife! I felt transformed. And then—I was. Beauty stared at me and gasped, "Beast, what has become of you! I see the boy in the portrait, but where are you?"

"Oh, my wonderful Beauty! Your love has transformed me. Because of you, I am once again all that I was born to be! You will be my wife!" I danced around Beauty, but she looked unhappy. I trembled inside. Had I misunderstood? Did she not want to marry me?

"But where is my Beast?" Beauty queried with a furrowed brow. "He is my true love. How can I marry you, when it is he that I love?"

"Beast and I are the same, Beauty," I explained as I dropped to one knee. "Only on the outside were we different. I am your Beast, forever and always."

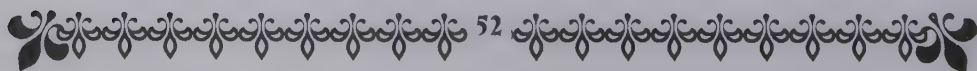
Thankfully, Beauty saw that my words were spoken in truth. She placed her tender hand in mine, saying, "As I loved Beast, so I will surely love you."



Our wedding was a day of celebration. The castle doors were open to the entire kingdom—rich and poor, beautiful and not-so-much. A special invitation was sent by courier to the troll to announce this happy day and to tell her how much we hoped to have her rejoice with us.

Beauty's father was delighted for us and for the love that we shared. And now that I had filled his coffers with gold, his financial worries were a thing of the past. His older daughters, who seemed to need so much, would have all they wanted once again.

"Beauty," I whispered as we danced, "have you noticed how much





larger your sisters look?"

"Why, now that you mention it, they do indeed seem strangely larger. I wonder what on Earth would make them grow like that?"

We soon observed the reason for their increasing girth. First a silver spoon was dropped into a pocket, then a silver bowl. "Your sisters are stealing the silver!" I said in alarm. "That cannot be allowed!" I started toward them to confront their thievery.

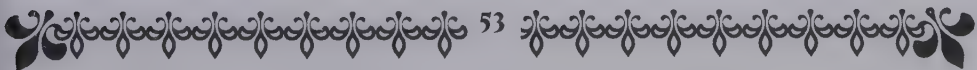
Beauty held me back. "Please do not bring them any harm or embarrassment. You said that whatever was yours will now also be mine. If you indeed meant that, please let my sisters have what they have taken. We do not need it. Our riches are far greater than our needs. Above all we have each other, and I can speak for myself when I say that I need no more."

My anger at her devious sisters melted with my gentle bride's loving words. Did she really mean it? Was having me all that she needed? How long had I ached to hear such words? For how many years had I feared it would never happen? I took Beauty into my arms. "With you by my side, I will not miss whatever your greedy sisters take. You are all I need, too, and I will love you forever, Beauty."

And so our wedding day ended happily, except for one unfortunate incident. It seems Beauty's two sisters were rude to the troll, which, as you have witnessed, is not a wise thing to do.

Between stealing the silver and gorging themselves on caviar and cake, Beauty's sisters still found the opportunity to tell everyone within earshot how terribly wronged they had been by their father and by their evil, selfish, greedy sister.

"Beauty," one sister snorted. "Why would anyone call her Beauty when her left eye is bigger than her right? And her crinkly lips are forever twisted in lies and deviousness. Why should she be marrying a prince? Are we not the older sisters? Shouldn't Father have given us the first choice of a husband? We would have clearly picked the prince over the pathetic husbands we were forced to marry," she added, oblivious to the





uncomfortable spouse standing beside her.

“And now,” the other whined, “Beauty will have all of the prince’s silver and gold, diamonds, emeralds, and pearls. It is not fair!” Both sisters protested, “Beauty will be staying up nights counting her jewels while we have to be content with the paltry baubles our cheap husbands can afford.”

Somewhere in the midst of all their complaining, the troll decided she had heard enough. “Stop your cruel talk. She is a genuine beauty—through and through.”

As I later learned, the eldest sister replied indignantly, “And just who are you to dare to tell us what to do? Other than being exceedingly revolting, I do not notice anything noteworthy about you!”

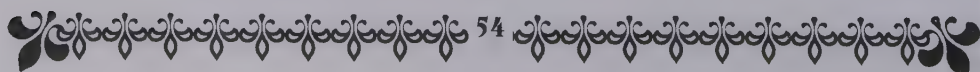
Her younger sister sniggered, “Perhaps she counts her worth based on the number of purple warts on her nose!”

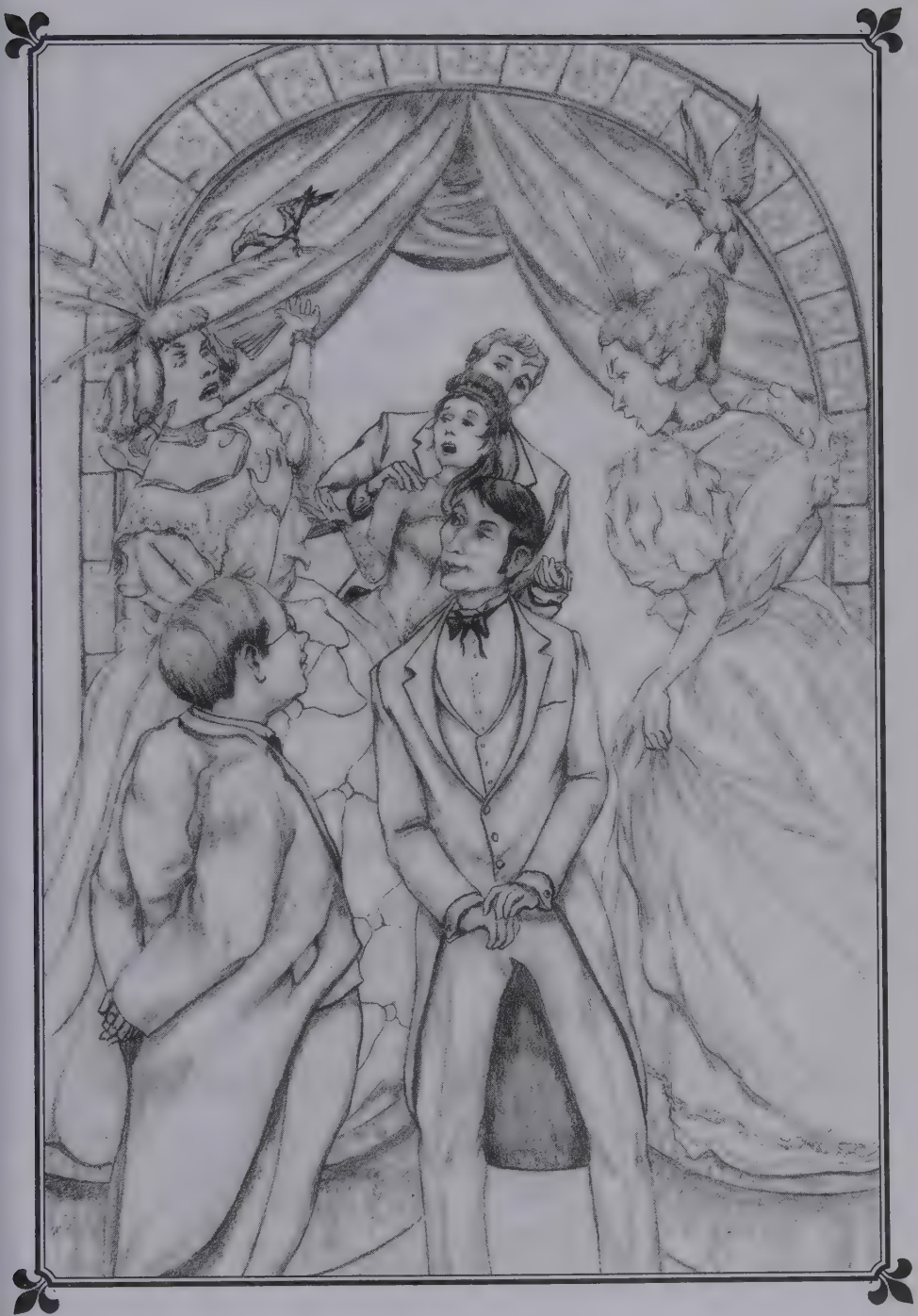
Both sisters burst into raucous laughter. “Yes, indeed. What are purple warts selling for nowadays?”

The troll had wanted to share our joy. She had come to our wedding filled with optimism—hoping that perhaps if I could find true love, there might also be love and rejoicing in her future. Unfortunately Beauty’s sisters had hit on that extremely sensitive topic—those unsightly purple warts.

The troll’s anger boiled over. With a vengeful wave of her knobby cane, she turned the sisters into statues of stone. “You will stand before these castle doors as a warning—that evil words will not be permitted in this home. Here you will be forced to watch the happiness of your sister and her princely husband. Here you will remain until there is a softening in your hearts and you are able to ask Beauty’s forgiveness for all the harmful, mean-spirited lies you have spread about her.” And with that, the troll vanished, never to be seen again.

When Beauty heard of her sisters’ misadventure with the troll, she was overcome with sadness. “They are my sisters, after all. I love them and forgive them for anything they may have said or done. Is there not







something we can do to help them?"

"Only they can change their circumstances," I explained, as I took Beauty's delicate hand in mine. "It is completely up to them."

"Then I know all will end well," exclaimed Beauty. "Surely they will choose to do what is right and good."

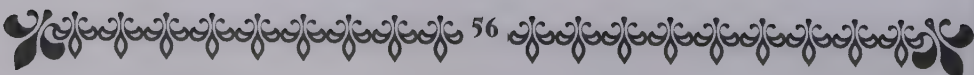
"Really?" I replied, and then thought it wise to say no more. From what I had seen of Beauty's sisters, I doubted they would ever do what was right or good—or even that they could accurately define either word. Beautiful they may have been, but good they were not. To me, their green eyes radiated the greed, envy, and selfishness that dwelled within them.

Still I thought my bride wonderful for thinking well of them. *You are so kind and good that you cannot even imagine that others might not have the same goodness inside. How admirable to go through life finding goodness all around you.*

And so my tale ends, as all tales must, with a moral:



*Those who have goodness within them
will believe goodness resides in others, too.
The traits we see in others are the same ones
that we have within us.*





The Sisters

Our dear departed mother raised us to be honest. "Speak truthfully and from your heart, and you will be rewarded," she would say. My older sister and I heeded her words and always spoke the truth. And where did it get us? Turned into stone statues! Yet Beauty, who has not spoken a word of truth in her entire life, has a stunningly handsome prince for a husband, a huge castle, priceless jewels, gorgeous silver, and . . . ! It pains us too much to think about everything she has!

Why has she been so rewarded, you may wonder? Because Beauty learned as a little girl to look up sweetly and say in her tiny little-girl voice, "Hello, my name is Beauty. Please don't give me any presents. Seeing you happy and well are the only gifts I need!"

Yeah, right. Our sister is one tough customer. Miss Goody Two-shoes, skipping through the flowerbeds with her little straw basket, never fooled us. But by the age of four, she had already wrapped Father around her deceptive little finger. And he was not the only one.

One day Father's elderly sister came to visit. Sister and I will never forget that unpleasant afternoon. We sat in the parlor sipping tea and nibbling on raisin cakes. "You are all such beautiful girls," Aunt Serena began. "Truly your beauty is a feast for my tired old eyes. How proud your father must be of his three lovely daughters!"

I smiled kindly at Aunt Serena, thinking how gracious of her to include our sister in that compliment. But what she said was not at all accurate. You see, if you look closely, it is quite plain that our little sister's right earlobe hangs lower than her left, and her left eye is larger than her right. Her face is downright misshapen! Sister and I felt compelled to tell the truth—that she and I are indeed breathtakingly beautiful. Our alabaster skin is flawless, our large, jade green eyes are framed by thick



black lashes. Above all, our features are perfect and exactly balanced on our faces. Still, we forgave Aunt Serena, knowing that her intent was to be kind.

Then the dim-witted old woman continued, "But the youngest is the most beautiful of all." Can you believe that? Sister and I were stunned. How could Aunt Serena utter such a bold-faced lie? It was then that we fully realized how close to blind that thoughtless woman had become.

"Blind as a mole!" I whispered to my elder sister.

"A bit senile, too," my good sister whispered back. "We must inform Father that Aunt Serena may need to have her head examined."

You would think that Aunt Serena's absurd observation would be enough to ruin a perfectly good day. Unfortunately there was more. We had to listen to our little sister gloat. "Do you think Aunt Serena is right that I am more beautiful than you? You two have such beautiful green eyes, and your skin is so lovely. How can I be more beautiful than you? I think it must be true, however, or the dear lady would not have said it."

"Did you not notice that Aunt Serena tripped over the footstool as she entered the room?" I replied. "Did you not see her fumble for a raisin cake? Poor, misguided Aunt Serena is practically blind."

"We have long worried that Aunt Serena did not see well, but when she said you were beautiful," our elder sister added, "it became painfully clear that Aunt Serena cannot see at all."

"Am I not beautiful?" our sister asked in her phony little-girl voice, hoping to force us to tell her that she was.

We chose honesty over false politeness. "Dear little sister, how we wish we could say you were a beauty like us, but that would be dishonest. You do remember how Mother taught us to speak the truth? As painful as it is for us to say it, the truth is that your face is misshapen."

"Misshapen?" the little manipulator asked with a false tremor in her voice.







"Your left eye is clearly a different size from your right. Your right earlobe hangs considerably lower than your left. Why, to tell the truth, we cringe every time we look at you. Surely you must be aware that there is something dreadfully wrong with your face!"

"Please do not feel sad," our elder sister said kindly. "Sister and I have enough beauty for all of us, and Father is a wealthy merchant. We are a fortunate family indeed!"

"Then why do you suppose other people call me Beauty, too?" she asked, not letting the unpleasant matter drop.

"It may be to mock you," we explained. "Or perhaps people think it is an act of kindness to mislead you about the way you really look. They call you Beauty because they don't want you to realize that you are exactly the opposite."


"Dear little sister," we then added lovingly, "since you seem to enjoy being misled about your looks, from this day forward we will call you Beauty, too. You will know, of course, that we are calling you Beauty because that is precisely what you are not."

~ 2 ~

Beauty was a handful. When she wasn't bugging us about her looks, she was busy demanding all of Father's attention. She could not tolerate having Father spend a moment with us and was incredibly jealous of every hug or kiss he gave us. She especially hated the lovely gifts he bought us. Not that she would ever admit that. Oh, no indeed! Beauty was far too clever to allow Father to know what was going on in her manipulative little mind.

"Your gifts for my sisters are so wonderful!" she would exclaim. "I am so happy that you spend so much money on their presents and that you had so little left over to spend on mine. But then, what do I care about material possessions? Why, if I had my way, I would never receive another gift again! In fact, dear Father, next time you return





from a voyage, please do not bring me a thing. Spend all your money on wonderful gifts for my sisters. They so love getting expensive gifts from you! As for me, as long as I have your love, I have all that I need or want.”


Father would lift Beauty up in his arms and gush, “Is she not special? So beautiful and special! Our Beauty does not want a thing but a hug from her father.”

Humpf!! See what we mean?

Then, just as Beauty anticipated, on his next trip Father would buy the most lavish gift of all for her. It might be a stunning bracelet with rubies and pearls or a pearl necklace with a clasp of gold. Whatever it was, one thing was always certain—it would be far more expensive than the gifts he purchased for my good sister and me. It was difficult not to grow bitter.

“If only Mother were still alive!” Sister and I consoled one another. “Mother would see right through Beauty’s phony act.” We just loved imagining how Mother would have handled Beauty. “Why you deceitful little imp! Don’t think you can fool me the way you have been fooling your father. I can see right through your little Miss Goody Two-shoes act. You are a phony from the tips of your toes to the top of your misshapen head! Now go to your room and bring me all the expensive gifts your father gave to you that should have gone to your beautiful older sisters. Shameful child!” How my good sister and I did enjoy imagining Beauty getting her comeuppance from Mother! The sad reality, however, was that Mother was gone, and Beauty manipulated Father skillfully. Whatever Beauty wanted, Beauty got.

Night after night we could see the light coming from her room. We knew Beauty was up into the early morning hours counting her possessions. “Here is how many dolls I have, and here is how many rings I have, and here is how many gold necklaces, and here is how many lace doilies.” Her list was endless. You never met a child more wanting of possessions than this girl. More and more and more! Good sister and I would ask,



“For goodness sake, Beauty, will you never have enough?”

Then she would give us that innocent wide-eyed stare, as if she didn’t know what we were talking about. “I was up late reading this wonderful book,” she would reply. “The tale was so charming, I stayed up reading until the early morning hours.”

Up late reading a book? How absurd! Given the chance to count possessions, why would anyone read? We could have respected her if she had only admitted this truth— “I am the spoiled rotten youngest daughter of a rich merchant, and the only thing I think about is getting more possessions. I will never have enough!”

Honesty was not Beauty’s style. Pretense and deceit were always her choices. It was just terrible for us, especially knowing that her gifts were of far greater value than ours. “Father,” we would cry, “why must you buy Beauty so much more than you buy us? Why must her gifts be so much better than ours? Do you not know how that makes us feel?”

Father would insist that our gifts were equal to Beauty’s. “If anything, I buy more and better things for the two of you than I buy for Beauty, but it seems to me that no matter what I buy for you, it is never enough. Yet whatever I buy for Beauty is more than she expected or even asked for. I fear that I have spoiled you. Why can you not be more like Beauty?”

At these hurtful words, my good sister and I gasped in horror! The unspoken was finally spoken. Father preferred Beauty to us! We had always sensed that was the case. We just could not comprehend why on Earth it should be so. We spoke the truth, while Beauty spoke lies. Why could Father not see that? Why did he not respect and love us for our honesty?

Then, just when we thought that nothing more could possibly go wrong, the unimaginable happened! Father returned from a trip with stooped shoulders and a terrible tale. “My ships laden with rich cargo have all been lost at sea. A ferocious storm has sunk them all! Our wealth rests at the bottom of the sea!”



Sister and I asked, "Does that mean you will no longer buy us the presents that we need?"

"Yes," Father said, "there will be no money for presents. There will be no money for servants. There will be no money for carriages and horses."

"Stop!" my good sister and I shrieked. "We did not greet you upon your arrival home to hear such depressing words. You raised us to be rich. You cannot now stand before us and say that we are poor and can no longer have this and that. How unfair and unfeeling of you!"

As for Beauty, that deceitful child said, "Dear Father, possessions mean nothing to me. I am concerned only about your welfare. What can I do to help?" It was embarrassing to listen to her. We looked at Father, hoping that at last he would see through her deception. Sadly the opposite occurred. Father hugged the little con artist, saying, "Thank you, Beauty. Your kind words are my only comfort."



When hope had all but disappeared and gloom had settled upon us, Father received word that one of his ships had been sighted at sea. It had been spared the storm's wrath and would be docking soon, fully laden with its expensive cargo.

As our joyful father prepared to leave to claim his ship, my good sister and I rushed to make lists of gifts he had to buy for us. Furs and diamond earrings and bracelets! Oh, now that we were to be rich once again, there were so many things we needed!

"What about you, Beauty? What can I bring back for you?" Father asked excitedly.

"Nothing, dear Father," she replied. "Just please return home safely."

"No, that will not do," Father insisted, as Beauty knew full well that he would. "I must bring you something."

To which Beauty replied, "Dear Father, how thoughtless of me. I





see now that my not asking for anything makes my sisters appear greedy and self-centered. That was not my intent. Even though I do not need or want anything besides your love and well-being, I now see that I must ask for something so that my sisters do not seem so demanding and grasping. Oh, I know the perfect thing! Bring me a rose. One beautiful red rose would make me so happy!"

How would you like to have Beauty as your sister? That little speech of hers was so typical. It was dishonest to the core and cleverly designed to make us look bad. How we survived those horrendous years at home with her, we will never know. On the bright side, we were to be rich once again. Father would return to us with his arms filled with fabulous gifts. We could hardly wait for his return.

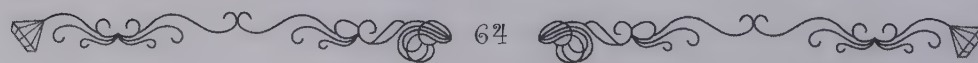
Unfortunately Father returned with bad news. The ship that was thought to be his was, in fact, not his at all. It had been a mistake. The ship belonged to another sea merchant. As had first been reported, all of Father's ships had been destroyed in that ferocious storm.

"What? A mistake?" my good sister and I cried out in horror. "Are you saying that we are not rich? That we are still poor? Father, how can you do this to us? It is so thoughtless and cruel! You are toying with our emotions!" We looked at his empty arms and exclaimed, "What about the gifts you promised? Are you now going to say that you did not buy us any? Does a promise to us mean nothing!"

Father just hung his head. "My beautiful daughters, I hope you will find it in your hearts to forgive me, especially now that I do not have much longer to live."

"What? More bad news? Have you not upset us enough for one day?" I placed my hands over my ears to make it clear that I wished to hear no more unpleasantness.

"Allow me to complete my terrible tale," Father continued, giving no thought to our feelings. "Returning home, I lost my way. As dusk began to fall, I came upon a castle I had never seen before. Entering the grounds, I called out, 'Is anyone there? Can anyone hear me?'"





When no one answered, Father knocked on the giant wooden door. The door creaked open, and Father was amazed by all of the wealth and extravagance that greeted him. Red marble with streaks of white and gold lined the walls, rich furnishings of silver, gold, ivory, and ebony filled the vast rooms, and giant oil paintings in carved wooden frames hung from the walls. "Who can own such splendor?" Father wondered. "This castle must be the home of a royal family."

"A royal family?" My good sister and I found hope in his words. "Did you ask if they have sons of marrying age? Father, that would be so cruel of you not to ask when you have two beautiful, marriageable daughters!"

"There was no one to ask," Father replied. "Unfortunately my tale does not have a happy ending."

"The prince was already married!" my good sister cried out in profound disappointment.

"Daughters, please let me finish," Father pleaded. "Dinner had been prepared, as if I had been expected. As I had not eaten since early morning, I partook of the delicious food laid out on the enormous dining room table. Then I lay down upon a velvet sofa and closed my eyes to rest for a moment. The next thing I knew, a rooster was announcing the new morning. I leapt to my feet, knowing that I needed to be on my way."

"Calling out my thanks to whomever might be there to hear, I closed the castle's huge wooden door behind me. Just as I was about to leave the castle's grounds, I spied a rosebush ablaze with beautiful red roses. The most beautiful rose of all was at the top of the bush. Remembering my promise to bring a rose to Beauty, I plucked that stunning rose."

At his words, my good sister and I shared a look of anguish. As always, Father had kept his promise to Beauty, while ignoring his promise to us. Rejection always hurts. That was how our lives had been ever since Mother's death. So much for Beauty, and so little for us!

"Upon my plucking that rose, a terrifying creature came bounding toward me. 'You have stolen the most beautiful rose of my beloved



rosebush! For that you must die!" The beast's sharp fangs were chomping as its long claws reached for me."

My good sister and I gasped in horror as the truth was revealed. "Do you see what trying to please Beauty has wrought? Your attempts to please that selfish, thoughtless girl have brought death upon you—and ruin upon our house!" We then confronted the cause of Father's suffering. "Beauty, we will never forgive you for the harm you have heaped upon our beloved father. Inconsiderate creature that you are! Because of you, our dear Father was almost ripped to shreds by a horrible beast!"

"Hush. Permit me to complete my tale. I fell upon my knees and pleaded for my life, explaining that I wanted to bring home a rose for my daughter. 'Your life can be spared,' the frightening beast replied, 'if you have a daughter who is willing to trade her life for your own. I will allow you to depart on the condition that you return with a daughter to take your place. If she will not come, I demand that you return here within three months so that I might mete out the punishment that you so richly deserve.' That is the end of my terrible tale." Father looked pleadingly at my good sister and me.

Here was a man who thought nothing of disappointing us. A man who had always favored Beauty over us with his gifts—and his love. Now in his time of trouble, he turned to us to solve his problem? The nerve! My good sister and I screeched, "How could you do this to us! First you tell us you are still poor and do not bring us the gifts you promised to bring. Then you tell us about a horrible beast who intends to kill you or one of your daughters in your stead. Can you not comprehend how upsetting your tale of woe is to us? Do you not ever think of anyone but yourself? Father, do not for one moment expect either of us to die for your deed. You picked that rose, not us! You must take responsibility for your own actions!" Then my good sister and I forced Beauty to face the truth. "You are the cause of all our problems! Thoughtless and inconsiderate as you are! Now our beloved father has to die because of your selfish request."





"My sisters are right," Beauty had no choice but to admit. "Father, I am the cause of your problems. Had I not asked for a rose, you would not be facing death. It is I, therefore, who must return with you to the beast and take your place."

At first Father would hear none of it. "Out of the question! I am old and will die soon anyway. You are young with your entire life ahead of you. I will return alone to the beast to accept my fate!"

Beauty protested, as well she should have. "No, Father, I could not live thinking you had lost your life because of me. Knowing that would be worse than death itself. I will return with you."

"Yes, Father!" my good sister and I agreed. "Beauty is the cause of our problems! We have long known that she is a troublemaker, and now you are seeing that, too!" Father turned away sobbing, and rushed from the room.

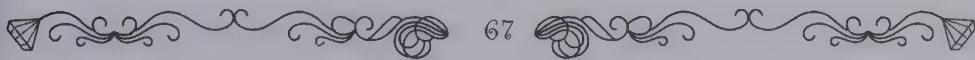
"Beauty, you must not weaken in your resolve. As your loving older sisters, we both agree it is only right that you take Father's place. And as sisters who care so deeply for you, we truly hope your death is swift and painless."

~ 4 ~

When Father returned from leaving Beauty with that beast, we greeted him with outstretched arms. "We are so happy to have you home and have our good family together once again. Now you must focus your thoughts on one thing and one thing only—how to become wealthy once again. You did it before—we know you can do it again!"

Unfortunately Father refused to stop grieving. "How could I have left my lovely, devoted daughter in the hands of that beast? How? How? How???"

"Father, please stop dwelling on the past! There are bills piling up on the kitchen table! There are servants refusing to work until they receive pay! There are festivities planned in town for which we must have new gowns, jewels, and slippers."





"How could I have done such a thing?" Father wept still louder.

"Father, you have two beautiful, living daughters who need to be taken care of now. Beauty, we imagine, is dead, and therefore has no further worries or need for your concern. We are alive and are consumed with worries about money. Please, Father, for once in your life think about us!" Our pleas were for naught. Even in death, Beauty came between Father and us.

At long last, my good sister and I determined that if anything were to be done to help our unfortunate situation, we would have to be the ones to do it. We sat down with parchment and ink quill and listed all of the eligible men in our township. It was a pitiful list, because few men possessed the wealth we knew was essential for a happy marriage. Finally it came down to just two names: Mr. Moni, the owner of the bank, and Mr. Ritch, the owner of Ye Olde Home Furnishings Shoppe in the center of town, which featured treasures in silver, gold, ebony, and ivory.

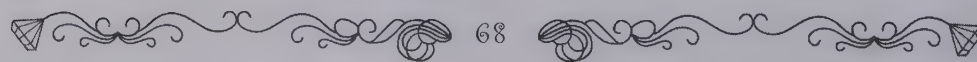
"Good sister, as the eldest it is your right to pick the husband of your choice. I will take the other," I said unselfishly.

"Yes, my good sister, as the eldest it is my right, and I choose Mr. Moni. I have long observed the lines of people depositing their earnings in his bank and know that his vault must be full of money for me to spend. Please know that I will be most generous with his money and share it with you should you ever have a need."

"That is indeed generous of you, good sister," I replied. "Please know, too, that I will share whatever gold and silver treasure catches your fancy, just as long as it is not an item that I particularly like."

The very next day, I dressed in my finest green silk frock—the one with ivory lace trim that went so well with my large, jade green eyes and flawless skin. I combed my luxurious auburn hair into a striking upsweep that emphasized my perfect features, and I set out to meet my future husband.

As I strolled down Main Street, I could not help but notice the awestruck stares of men and women alike, appreciating my beauty and





style. I was indeed a feast for the eyes as I entered Ye Olde Home Furnishings Shoppe. As I admired a splendid silver tray with elegant engraving that I determined to have Mr. Ritch present to me as one of my wedding gifts, Mr. Ritch approached me. "May I be of service, my lovely lady?" he inquired.

I turned slowly so that he would have a full view of my exquisite profile and flawless alabaster skin. Then, looking directly at him, so as to offer a full-face view of my perfectly balanced features, I batted my large jade eyes with their double-thick lashes and murmured, "I fear that I am feeling faint."

"Dear lady, is something wrong?" he cried out in concern.

"It is just . . . it is just . . ."

"It is just what?" he exclaimed.

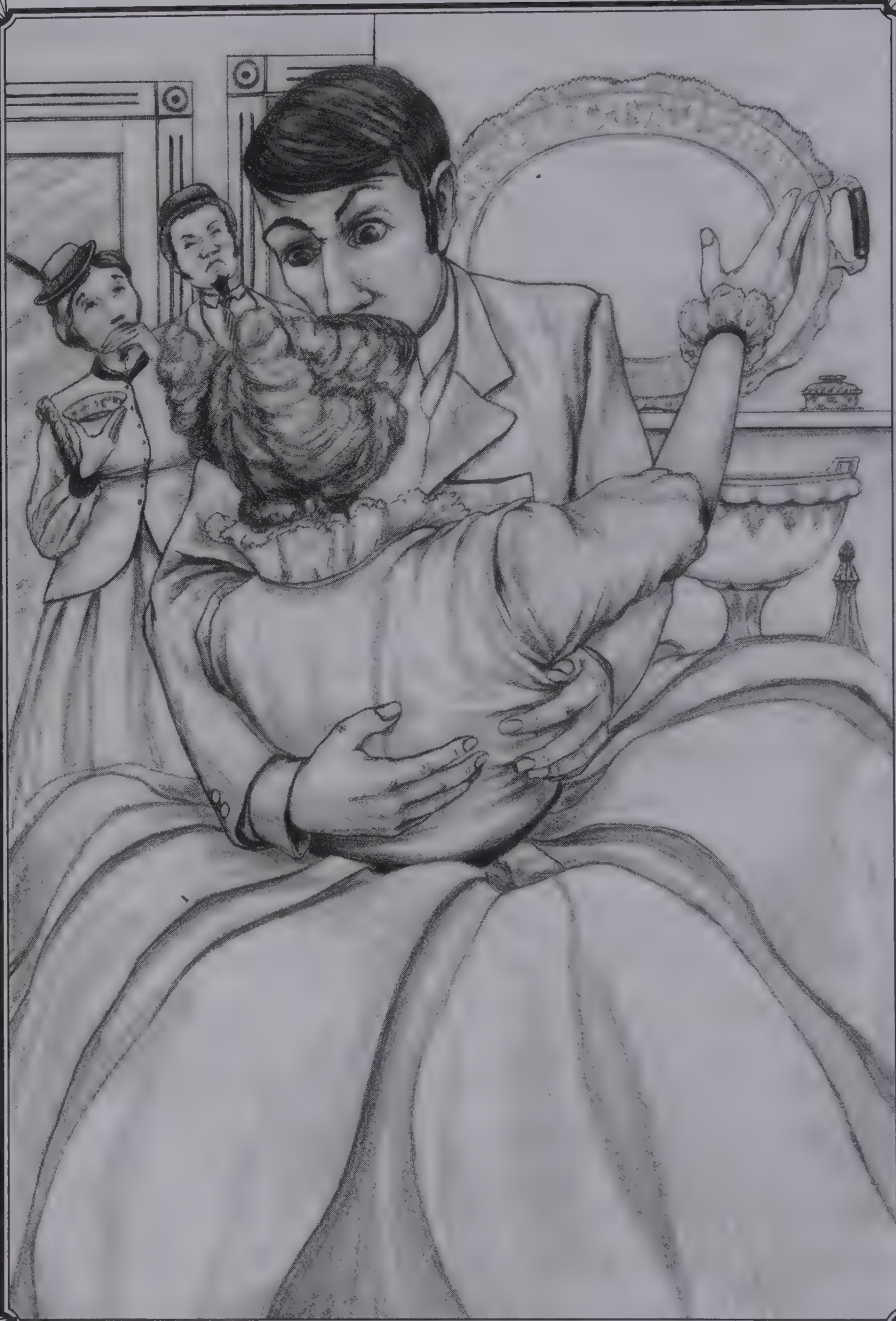
"It is just that you're so handsome and strong. You're so powerful, and I feel so weak beside you that . . ." With those words, I swooned into his waiting arms.

Mr. Ritch and I were married the following month. The week after that, my good sister walked down the aisle with her love-struck darling, Mr. Moni, at her side.

~ 5 ~

Those who marry in haste find misery and regret to be their constant companions. That is what happened to my good sister and me. I was married barely a month when I discovered that the treasures in my husband's shop were not to be mine. "Why can I not take that lovely silver bowl from your shop window? I must have it for holding fresh-cut flowers when sipping my afternoon tea."

For some odd reason, my silly husband imagined that my question was his opportunity to enlighten me on all of the financial details involved in owning Ye Olde Home Furnishings Shoppe. According to him, all of the treasures in his shop were purchased on something





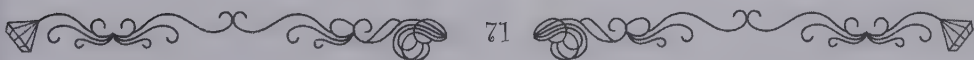
called credit and had to be sold at a higher price so that the credit could be repaid, expenses for running the shop could be paid, employees could be paid, taxes could be paid, blah, blah, blah. "Please get to the point, husband," I finally snapped. "What does all your talk have to do with the bowl I need for holding fresh-cut flowers? Am I going to get that bowl or not?" The short of it all was that I was not going to get that silver bowl. Not only that, but I was not going to get any of the items on the list I had so painstakingly written out and tucked so lovingly under his pillow as a hint about little treats he could bring home as surprises for me.

Clearly the marriage was not going as planned. "Do you feel it was fair of you to mislead me into marrying you? Do you think for one instant I would have agreed to marry you had I known I could not have my pick of the lovely treasures in your shop?"

Mr. Ritch then asked if I had married him for his money. "Indeed not," I replied. "I married you for the lovely things you have in your shop!" And I added, "I did not marry you to be burdened with your problems. I married you so that I would not have any problems. Please remember that!" I then spent my evenings with a damp cloth on my forehead to ease the pounding in my head.

Sister, too, faced severe disappointment in her marriage. To her great unhappiness, she discovered that all that money in the vault of Mr. Moni's bank did not belong to him. It belonged to the people who deposited it in his bank! Can you imagine? He has to give it back whenever they want it. Astounding! "Why would they have given their money to you if they didn't mean for you to keep at least some of it?" she asked, confused and upset. Then Mr. Moni went into a terribly boring tirade about how banks work.

"Who cares about how banks work?" my good sister shrieked at last, her patience gone. "Are you rich or are you not? Just answer that simple question truthfully." Mr. Moni was nowhere near as rich as dear sister and I had supposed. We had both been hoodwinked by deceitful men!





My poor sister also spent her evenings with a damp cloth on her forehead to ease the pounding in her head.



Then, just when one would have thought life could not treat me any more unkindly, Beauty returned. There was a knock at my door. When I opened it, Beauty stood there before me, a large smile on her asymmetrical face and a huge emerald ring on the limp hand she extended in greeting. I gasped with disbelief, "Is that enormous emerald real?"

"Oh, is that an emerald in my ring?" she asked innocently. "You know how little I know or care about precious stones, dear sister. You know all about precious jewels though, don't you? Can you tell me about the stone in my ring? Do you think it might be valuable? I should be so surprised if it were." Her words hit me like a kick from a mule. So sweet and innocent! So unconcerned about things of value! Ha!

The cunning little hypocrite had returned. All those miserable years of living in the same house with this dishonest creature came rushing over me. It was all I could do not to slam the door in her distorted face. "Please come into my simple home, dear sister," I choked out politely.

Beauty sat beside me on the sofa and took my hand in hers. "How happy I am to be back with you, dear sister! You must know how much I have missed all my family. Now let me tell you all that has happened to me since I saw you last."

"Yes, please do," I replied. "I would like to know in particular about that huge emerald ring on your finger."

"Allow me to start at the beginning and come to the ring in due course," Beauty said, as she launched into an amazing tale of lies and distortions calculated to make her appear to be the embodiment of innocence and honesty!





I clasped my hands tightly in my lap so as to quell the urge to choke her giraffe-like neck. What became painfully clear was that as we had been trembling with fear for Father at his tale of the dreadful beast, Beauty had been sniffing out opportunity. With her calculating mind, it became obvious to her that while Father had no prospects, this wealthy beast clearly did.

That explained why Beauty went so willingly with Father to meet that hideous beast. We should have known! While my good sister and I were living in poverty and grieving at the thought that our little sister was being ripped apart by the claws and fangs of the cruel monster, she was advancing her position in life and securing her future. I never encountered such cunning.

My older sister had the misfortune to call on me just then, so now the two of us were forced to listen to Beauty as she rambled on about her interactions with the beast. Clearly Father was not the only man taken in by Beauty's sweet and innocent act. Beast was conned by her as well! I can just imagine her words upon meeting the creature. Oh, dear Beast, you are so big and strong, and I am so small and weak. Then, no doubt, she gave a sweet little tremble, perfectly calculated to make the beast's heart melt. "I can see why you were named Beauty," she claimed Beast said. *Humpf!* I thought. *If indeed it did say that, it has a weakness for misshapen faces.* But I only smiled as my dear little sister chatted blissfully on about her wonderful, opulent life.

Yes, while my good sister and I were living in misery, Beauty was enjoying a life of luxury in the castle. Each evening the beast joined her for an elegant dinner served on exquisite porcelain and crystal. As Beauty told it, poor lovesick Beast just watched her eat while repeating endlessly, "Beauty, will you marry me. Will you be my wife?"

How did Beauty answer, you may wonder? The tale she told is that she looked directly at it and replied, "Dear Beast, you're kind of heart, but I do not love you. I cannot become your wife if I do not love you. I trust you understand."







Knowing Beauty as I do, she was no doubt making an inventory of all the possessions in the castle so that she would have some way of figuring out Beast's worth. Surely she was not going to marry such a heinous animal unless the fortune that came with the marriage was worth her while.

Then, as Beauty would have us believe, she dreamed that our dear father was distraught and pining away over her loss. She convinced Beast to allow her to return home for eight days to comfort our grieving father. The truth is she probably had completed her inventory of Beast's possessions and now needed to get a price placed on each item.

At last Beauty concluded her interminable tale. "Oh, dear sisters, I have spent all this time talking just about me! I need to hear about you." She turned to me and said, "Please start by telling me about that lovely silver tray on your dining room table. It's so large and so beautifully engraved. That tray must be so valuable. By any chance, might you know how much it costs?" As a matter of fact I did, and I let her know precisely how expensive that fine silver tray really was.

"Oh, that *is* expensive!" Beauty's uneven eyes grew wide. "Now tell me how much you think it might cost if it were three times as large, had finer engravings, and had a border of red and green stones."


"Are you talking about rubies and emeralds?" I stammered, quite taken aback.

"Yes, now that I think of it, those stones may very well be rubies and emeralds," Beauty replied. "But you know me, I scarcely notice such things. Do you have any idea what a tray like that might sell for?"

I would not give her the satisfaction of a reply. "Where have you seen such a tray? By any chance, is there such a tray in Beast's castle?"

"There are a few," she replied. "Well, maybe more like a dozen, but of course, I really wouldn't know, not being wrapped up in possessions the way you are." Then she inquired about the porcelain bowl in my cupboard. "What a lovely bowl! Did it by chance cost as much as the silver tray? What do you suppose it might sell for if it were ten times as





large and had a gold rim? I do want to meet your beloved husband,” she continued innocently. “Is he really the owner of Ye Olde Home Furnishings Shoppe? Why don’t we stroll over there now? It would be so good to meet the man who has made you so happy!”

Let me tell you—Beauty was one busy lady! When she was not talking prices with my husband, she was comparing the fortune of every available bachelor in the countryside with my good sister’s husband. Beauty loved to curl up at the feet of my dear sister’s husband, saying, “Not caring about possessions myself, I have no idea what any particular one may be worth. Why, I would not know a rich man from a poor one!” Then she would smile sweetly. “How much do you think Mr. Oakley who owns the lumber mills might be worth? What about Mr. Horsely, who has that great big farm in the next town?”

Beauty told us that she had agreed to be away from Beast for only eight days. That promise went out the window as soon as she found out how long it took to obtain prices for all the items on her inventory list and compare the fortunes of all the eligible bachelors in town. But after 12 days, Beauty vanished. With nary a word to her loyal sisters or devoted father!

A few days later, we got a wedding invitation. Beauty had undoubtedly completed her research and had determined that Beast was worth more than all the local bachelors combined. So she did not waste any time getting him to marry her. “Oh, dear Beast,” I could imagine her cooing. “My being apart from you has let me know how much I love you. Yes, I love you, dear Beast and want to marry you right away. I cannot imagine any greater happiness than being your loving wife!”

Oh, puh-leeze!

~ 7 ~

When sister and I arrived at the castle on Beauty’s wedding day, we were struck dumb by its size and beauty. It was even grander than



Father had led us to believe. Then upon entering the castle itself, our mouths fell open at the amazing luxury surrounding us.

The greatest shock was still awaiting us, however. Standing beside Beauty was the most handsome man we had ever seen. His hair was a gorgeous, wavy blonde, and his sky blue eyes made my knees weak. "Oh, who is that dreamboat?" we asked one another. "Where is Beauty's horrific beast?"

Sister and I confronted Father. "Is that dream of a man the nightmare of a monster that you told us about?"


"Yes, indeed. That fine and handsome man was indeed the beast I encountered so many months ago," Father said admiringly.

I could not believe that Father actually expected us to believe this preposterous lie. According to the absurd tale Father spun, this handsome prince had been turned into a beast by a mean-spirited troll when it... er... he... Beast was just a boy. He was restored by the true love of a beautiful girl who saw through his ugliness to the goodness within. And do you know who that beautiful girl was? Our dear, sweet sister, Beauty! Oh, humpf!!!!

"Father!" my good sister and I screamed, "it is so painfully clear to us that once again you have given Beauty what should have been ours. We are the older sisters. We are the ones who should have had first choice in marrying a handsome prince! You created that ridiculous story about a savage beast to keep us from meeting this sensational prince. You knew full well that had he met us first, he would never be marrying Beauty today. We will never forgive you this injustice! You have done many hurtful things to us, but this is by far the worst."

In the receiving line following the wedding ceremony, Beauty hugged my good sister and me. Then she turned to the prince and exclaimed, "Oh, sweet husband, these are my beautiful sisters. I know you will love them dearly!" Her words were like daggers in our aching hearts. There it was—out in the open, and from her own mouth, too. She knew that he would love us! We all knew it! We saw





the way he stared at our large, jade green eyes, our flawless alabaster skin, and our perfectly balanced features. *If only I had met your beautiful sisters first!* he was no doubt thinking. Alas, he was not given that chance because Father and Beauty had plotted to keep him from seeing us until it was too late—until he was safely married to her.

Still, despite all the injustice that had been done to us, my good sister and I held our tongues. Indeed we did, even when Beauty had the nerve to accuse my good sister and me of stealing her precious silver. Can you imagine such rudeness? Yet I held my tongue, saying only, “There is no reason for me to be interested in cheap, dented silver when I have far finer silver in my own home.”

My good sister added, “Beauty, this is your wedding day, and despite the fact that you have robbed my good sister and me of happiness, we do not want to say an unpleasant word to you. We beg you not to provoke us any more than you already have.”

We showed admirable restraint—until the end of the wedding reception, when Beauty had the nerve to announce to all the guests, “I know you are all looking at me with your hearts filled with envy for all that I possess. Yes, it is a great deal. The castle belongs to me, as does all the expensive silver, porcelain, and crystal that you see in front of you. And there is far more hidden away in secret chambers and drawers. I am truly a fabulously wealthy woman now.

“Above all, I want all of you—whose hearts are churning with bitter envy over all the possessions that I have and you lack—to know that I do not care about any of my possessions. To me, they are just things, nothing of real value like the true love I share with my beloved prince. In that way, I am so very different from my two older sisters who care only about possessions. Is that not right, dear Father?”

At that point, my good sister and I could hold our tongues no longer. Could you? Could anyone? “Why you greedy, gold-digging money-grubber!” we shrieked. “Who do you think you are fooling! Possessions are the only thing that have ever mattered to you!



You are so dishonest! What's more . . ."

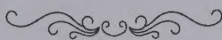
Suddenly, an exceptionally ugly old woman with purple warts on her nose and a knobby cane in her bony hand appeared before us. "It is not right for you to say those wicked words to your kind and loving sister on her wedding day."

"And who are you to tell us what is right?" my good sister demanded. "Other than being exceptionally ugly, I do not see anything noteworthy about you!"

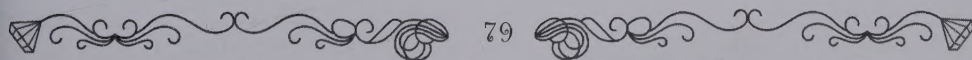
"Rather than tell us what we can or cannot say, you should spend your time doing something about those horrible warts on your nose!"

Whereupon that repulsive woman waved her cane at us, and the next thing we knew, my good sister and I had turned into stone statues. "You will spend your days at the door of the castle watching the happiness of your good and honest sister," that terrible woman declared. "You will remain there until you recognize your faults and beg Beauty to forgive you."

Now I come to the ending of this painful tale of dishonesty and deceit. Does it have a moral, you may wonder? Indeed it does. Let us review the facts: Beauty was dishonest, which merited her a gorgeous prince and life in a luxurious castle. We were honest, which earned us the reward of being turned into stone statues, doomed to watch our devious sister's happiness for the rest of our lives. If you think we will ever beg Beauty to forgive us for speaking the truth, you can forget it!



Moral: In this dishonest world, few appreciate the truths spoken by the perfectly shaped lips of beautiful and noble ladies.





You are probably familiar with the modern version of “Beauty and the Beast,” but did you know that in the traditional tale, Beauty has two older sisters? Imagine if you were able to find out what Beauty’s sisters thought about this whole situation!

In *Beauty, the Beast, and the Sisters: A Thrice-told Tale*, you’ll get that opportunity, as well as the chance to hear both Beauty’s and Beast’s points of view.

Whose version of the story do *you* believe?
Or do you have another point of view altogether?



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